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The Literary Relationship of Coventry Patmore and Alfred Lord Tennyson

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THE LITERARY RELATIONSHIP OF
COVENTRY PATMORE AND
ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

By

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the Requirements for the Degree of Master
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VITA

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most fascinating periods of English Literature is that of Victoria, and one of the most interesting groups of the many literary circles of her day is that which heralded the "second spring" of Catholic literature in England. Into the myriad paths of Victorian Literature these Catholic men and women injected the sacramental quality of their faith, and made their poetry as "a light shining in the darkness" of the scientific and religious confusion. Patmore and Thompson have been marked as the poetic leaders of this movement. The elder, Patmore, whose writing began early and ended late in Victoria's reign, has been chosen as the subject of this thesis. The problem introduced itself in Father Calvert Alexander's Catholic Literary Revival. The challenge, then, became a search to prove or disprove the following statements which are not in themselves unusual as they appear in several biographies of Patmore and must necessarily be included in even a brief consideration of his life. In speaking of Patmore's early life while he was working at the British Museum, Father Alexander says:

It was during this period that he first met Tennyson, spent much time with him in nocturnal discussions of poetic problems, and in many other ways looked up to him as a leader and inspirer.

A contrasting quotation brings out Patmore's later aversion to Tennyson.

His impatient search for reality was leading him in a direction opposite to that taken by Tennyson. Patmore resented the time wasted in following Tennyson around "like a dog," and was inclined to blame the failure of "The Angel in the House" on the Tennysonian influence.¹

A critical comparison of both men will show certain similarities of ideas in both form and thought. Patmore's violent reaction to Tennyson and his "Tennysonia," as he called the Laureate's works, will be proved not only a reaction against the man but against the period which Tennyson so properly represented.

The principal difficulty involved in the thesis occurs in the problem of tracing influence. It is almost an impossibility for anyone to state that one man's work was influenced solely by another's. Influence is not something that is tangible, and often it defies measurement. It may seem to exist where in reality it was never present. Friendship does not necessarily mean influence. Morize in his Problems and Methods of Literary History stated:

Influence by its very nature does not always declare itself by precise and well-defined signs; its study does not admit of the same exactness as, for instance, the

¹ Calvert Alexander, The Catholic Literary Revival (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1935), pp. 59-60.

investigation of sources. Frequently, it consists in following the capricious, unexpected meanderings of a stream whose waters are led hither and thither by the accidental contour of the ground and take their color from the various tributaries and the soil through which they flow...²

In Patmore's case, as in any other, there may have been several influences present, some exerting more active pressure than Tennyson's. This could occur without even the author himself being aware of it. Certainly, then, it is dangerous to attempt to measure an influence a century later. Morize again warns of the danger of drawing or attempting to establish a fact from mere parallels, or of falling into the "strange blindness induced in a scholar by the desire to prove a preconceived theory."

Awareness of these problems made it necessary, first of all, to seek confirmation of the statement by Alexander in authorities on both Patmore and Tennyson. Several men, among them Basil Champneys, Edmund Gosse, Derek Patmore, Harold Nicolson and Ward and Waller supported this conclusion that Tennyson exerted an influence on Patmore and his work. In no case, however, do they give conclusive evidence, rarely much reason for their statements.

Most of the evidence of the friendship came from the biographers or critics of Patmore. Champneys theorized that

² Andre Morize, Problems and Methods of Literary History (Chicago: Ginn and Co., 1922), p.229.

either Tennyson requested the deletion in his biography of any reference to Patmore or that his son Hallam thinking it to be his father's wish, suppressed any mention of the friendship in his Memoirs of Tennyson. In general, Tennyson's early biographers followed suit but the more modern, such as Nicolson, make reference to it. In this regard Derek Patmore says, "A conspiracy of silence surrounds the friendship of Tennyson and Coventry Patmore...and many of the documents that would have thrown light on what must have been one of the most interesting friendships of the Victorian era have been destroyed."³

In dealing with the friendship of Patmore and Tennyson, Basil Champneys' definitive biography of Patmore becomes the main source of information. Leslie called the biography "a family scrapbook which swells the annals of a quiet era." The arrangement of the book, Leslie stated, betrays the fact that Champneys was more an architect than a biographer. "But even a depository," he continues, "becomes interesting when filled with the stuff of so curious a life as Patmore's."⁴

³ Derek Patmore, Portrait of My Family (New York: Harper and Bros., Publishers, 1935), p.99.

⁴ Shane Leslie, "Coventry Patmore," Studies in Sublime Failure (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1932), p. 116.

The Academy in an interesting review of the biography said:

Mr. Champneys has apparently aimed at a Boswellian minuteness and completeness in the biography and certainly he has succeeded in giving a remarkably full account of a man whose outwardly uneventful life would seem to leave little scope for the biographer. Its two volumes equal in bulk the biography of Lord Tennyson. Yet the recluse, Tennyson, was almost a man of the world compared to Coventry Patmore. The literature of Tennyson's day revolved round him; a constant succession of more or less eminent men were his friends at all periods of his life and help to diversify his biography with extraneous interest. Whereas Patmore after mingling in the literary stream during his youth, withdrew from it and gradually disused most of the illustrious friendships formed during those earlier days, becoming an intellectual contemplative beyond even the wont of poets.⁵

Accordingly, it is the purpose of this thesis to show what is known of the friendship between Patmore and Tennyson; to point out similarities in form, expression and thought in their works; to show the weakening of the friendship and Patmore's ultimate rejection of Tennyson's principles and philosophy; and finally, to attempt to evaluate the influence of the friendship of Tennyson for Patmore from the evidence that has been presented.

⁵ "Coventry Patmore," The Academy, 59:399, Nov. 3, 1900.

CHAPTER I

THE FRIENDSHIP OF TENNYSON AND PATMORE

The early years of Victoria's reign foreshadowed the greatness of the literature of the period. Immediately upon her ascension to the throne of England, the Queen began to instill into her people the ideals which were to mark the period as her own. There had been need for moral and social reform, and, generally, the English people saw this before their monarchs. In fact, the Great Reform Bill of 1832 had been forced through Parliament before her reign had begun. In 1837, when Victoria became the ruler of England, she was faced with the challenge of a growing spirit of democracy, an upheaval in social customs, and a great division in religious thought.

These problems, although they belonged to the monarchy, were naturally the same as those that confronted the common man, especially the thinking man of England. Victoria's attempts to solve them were often clumsy and sometimes ridiculous; and, as a result, a complicated system of social manners and customs arose which both amused and irritated later generations. Victoria, however, and those who were working with her, were honestly attempting to offer definite solutions and make constructive contributions to balance the upheaval that

was their inheritance from the philosophical and industrial revolutions of the preceding century.

These same changes had to be met by the poets of the period, and a Victorian writer had either to construct a principle or to compromise one. Burgum, in speaking of the situation that the Victorian faced, said:

Dreadful temptations lay in their paths but they shut their eyes to them, and prayed to avoid them by walking slowly. Herein lies the definition of Victorianism. These men were trying to make an age of transition stable, and to do it, as the religious ought, by an appeal to principle. They were not conscious of the fact that evangelism had given them more of emotion than of principle, and that their conduct, therefore, was more often based upon habit and self-interest than upon principle which ignored their irrelevancy. So it may be said that the only persons who succeeded to their real satisfaction in making the age stable were those who like romanticists, abandoned it for another, and like evangelicals chose their other age for religious reasons.¹

In literature, particularly in poetry, one name began early in her reign to be marked as outstanding by discerning Victorians. Critics today, as then, say that Alfred Lord Tennyson is the most typical of all of Victoria's poets and the one most deserving in every respect to be called Victorian.

Tennyson had few English readers or admirers prior to the publication of his second volume of poetry in 1842.

¹ Edward B. Burgum, "Victorianism," The Sewanee Review, 36:276, July, 1928.

Criticism of his earlier volume had destroyed not only his enthusiasm but that of the public. With the publication of his poems of 1842, literary circles in England realized that despite adverse criticism an important poet had entered into English letters. Bayne pointed out that the moment was not inauspicious for the appearance of a new poet.

The fashions of thought and feeling which had prevailed during the last years of the war and the first years of the peace had begun to change. Byronism, still powerful with the multitude, was ironically smiled at in cultivated circles. Political excitement had succeeded to the enthusiasm of youth renewed after long decrepitude; the genius of mechanism, already laying down here and there an iron line between town and town made infinite promises and awakened infinite hope... Many influences...were working toward undefined issues; more aspiring, more exacting taste and deeper reflectiveness were replacing the somewhat shallow and showy modes of the Regency.²

Two years after Tennyson's most successful 1842 volume had appeared, another young poet Coventry Patmore published a book of poetry which marked him as a disciple of Tennyson. Friends and critics alike noted the similarity in subject matter and form. Some even thought the work to be that of Tennyson published under a pseudonym. Both poets, Patmore and Tennyson, were writing what the elder poet termed "English

² Peter Bayne, "Tennyson," Lessons from My Masters (New York: Harper Bros., Publishers, 1879), p. 205.

Idyls" and both were reflecting in a strikingly similar way the conventions and ideals of early Victorianism.

In a study of Patmore and Tennyson, the year 1842 may well be a starting point. Up to this time the nineteen year old Patmore, encouraged by his father, had dabbled in art and poetry, mathematics and science. The elder Patmore, who was personally responsible for his son's education, directed the artistic and literary tendencies in Patmore from the deep literary knowledge that he possessed. He was also proud of Coventry's natural inclination toward mathematics and science, and unwisely displayed the boy's talents to house guests. Champneys related an incident which illustrates this.

At one time he showed considerable talent for mathematics, and his father seems, not very wisely, to have made exhibitions to his friends of the child's proficiency. Coventry would be called down to the drawing-room and asked questions of some difficulty; he would retire into a corner of the room to reflect and then return to the questioner with the answer ready.³

Besides his early interest in mathematics, Patmore became enthusiastic about art. In 1838, he was awarded the silver palette of the Society of Arts for a copy of one of Landseer's pictures. In 1839, he was sent to Paris to school, and this was the only period in his life spent under regular

³ Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), Vol. I, p. 31.

tutelage. The experience was not profitable and yielded Patmore a twofold dislike: one for formal education, and the other for the French people. This, as other early impressions, he carried throughout life. This hatred of the people and the country appeared several times in his later poems.

Returning from Paris in 1840, the seventeen year old boy spent some time in writing his two earliest poems, "The River" and "The Woodman's Daughter." Then, suddenly, his fancies turned to science and, supported by his father's indulgence, he fitted up a laboratory in the seldom used kitchen of his London home. Here he made what his father and friends thought was the discovery of a new chloride of bromine. Coupled with his scientific studies was his growing interest in philosophy and religion. Plato's philosophy and the Church of England challenged his intellect, and for sometime he even thought of taking orders in the Church. This vocation he gave up, since, as Champneys pointed out, he had some difficulty in accepting the Thirty-nine Articles, and was gradually coming to realize that Poetry was his true vocation.

In 1842, then, the nineteen year old boy had exhausted his enthusiasm for science, given up his idea of serving the Church, and was once more busily engaged in writing poetry. Patmore, himself, attributes this reawakening of interest in

poetry to the publication of Tennyson's "Poems of 1842."⁴ He said that a reading of these poems renewed the poetic ambition in him and forced him to write. One of his father's friends, Laman Blanchard, after hearing some of Coventry's early poems, wrote: "My strong and clear conviction of the extreme beauty and finish of what I heard read last night remains this morning undiminished. They will bear thinking over, and the impression they make is a lasting one, I am sure. Nothing that Tennyson has done need be despaired of."⁵ The resonance of Tennyson's success induced the friends of Patmore to delay publication of his poetry. It was not until 1844 that Moxon published a thin green volume of "Poems" by Coventry Patmore.

Almost at once and to the end of his life Patmore regretted this early publication. He was not spared by the critics, for the invectives hurled at him were more bitter than those which attacked Tennyson's early volume. Blackwoods, the most severe of his critics, called the 1844 volume "the life into which the slime of the Keateses (sic) and Shelleys of former times has fecundated."⁶

⁴ Champneys, op. cit., p. 49.

⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

⁶ "Poems by Coventry Patmore," Blackwoods Magazine, 56:342, September, 1844.

However, the poems were not without praise. The public commendation of Leigh Hunt, "Maga" styled leader of the Cockney school of poetry, drew more fire upon Patmore because of his support of the poems. Bulwer Lytton is considered by Patmore to be his first discerning critic, and he valued his criticism above that of many others. Gosse quotes from an unpublished letter of Browning, which is dated July 31, 1844, to show how he regarded these poems and their young author.

A very interesting young poet has blushed into bloom this season. I send you his soul's child; the contents were handed and bandied about and Moxon was told by the knowing ones of the literary world that "Patmore was safe to win." Moxon relented from his stern purposes of publishing no more verse on his own account and did publish this.⁷

Within a year after the publication, Patmore, who had been surrounded and almost smothered by parental indulgence, was cast suddenly and violently on his own by the simple expedient of a letter from his father which announced his bankruptcy and departure for the continent, and enclosed a small amount of money with a warning to expect no more. Patmore was forced on his own resources and despite his versatility, they proved to be few as far as making money was

⁷ Edmund Gosse, Coventry Patmore (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 26.

concerned. Champneys related how Coventry and his younger brother Gurney managed to earn a scanty livelihood by contributions to periodical literature and by translations from French to German. He managed to earn only twenty-five shillings a week, after working for it, as he said, "about sixteen hours a day."⁸

In these days of extreme poverty the young poet was helped by some outstanding literary men of the period. Bryan Waller Procter gave him a position in his law office probably intending to teach him law. Thackeray interceded for him with the publisher and editor of "Fraser" to accept and print his material. Finally, after fifteen months of extreme poverty and some detriment to his health, Patmore's problem was brought to an end by Mr. Mockton Milnes whom he met at the Procter home and where, in the same year, he had met Tennyson. To Milnes' inquiry about "the lean young friend with the frayed coat cuffs" Mrs. Procter answered with glowing enthusiasm of the young man's ability as a poet and with woeful realism of his dire poverty. Characteristically, Milnes became interested and offered Patmore a job at the British Museum, where he was employed for twenty years and which enabled him at least to live modestly.⁹

⁸ Champneys, op. cit., p. 62.

⁹ Champneys, op. cit., p. 64.

From the time his interest in Tennyson had been stirred so vigorously by the 1842 poems, Patmore had been anxious to meet the man "who was already, in his opinion, the great poet of the day and for whose work he then had an almost unlimited admiration."¹⁰ The definitive biographer Champneys because of lack of evidence did not attempt to date the actual meeting of the two men although he stated that the meeting place was most probably the Procter home. But Derek Patmore and Edmund Gosse, Patmore's son and good friend respectively, agreed, again on a probability, that the meeting took place at the Procter home in the winter of 1845 during the time of Patmore's extreme poverty. Gosse reported the meeting as follows:

It was during these months of poverty and independence that Coventry Patmore formed the most valuable friendship of his early life. Cast forth out of the snug nest in which paternal indulgence had so long protected him, the young poet seems to have faced the dark streets of London and the horrors of cheap lofty lodgings with complete courage. He was sustained in this by the companionship of one of broader experience than his own, of maturer years and more commanding genius. It seems to have been in the winter of 1845, and soon after the flight of his parents to Paris that Coventry Patmore met Tennyson for the first time. The elder poet had passed through great tribulation, smitten at once in fortune and in health. He had, however, recently been lifted out of these deep waters by the timely grant of a pension of two hundred pounds, which enabled him to live in modest comfort and

¹⁰ Champneys, op. cit., p. 178.

even to travel a little. It enabled him to come up sometimes to London from Cheltenham, which was then his headquarters. He was still unwell and out of spirits; Patmore exaggerated both his age and his disease when he saw him first, taking him to be a man of advanced years, doomed to die in a few months.¹¹

Actually Tennyson was only thirty-six, but he was still subject to the deep silence and fits of melancholy induced by the savage reception of his first book of poems and principally because of the death of his dear friend Arthur Hallam. He was a man who had enjoyed in the fullest way the privilege of a deep friendship and his very nature almost revelled in sorrow and melancholy as another would in joy. He suffered from a neurotic condition and had been warned by his doctor "not to read, not to think." By his own choice he was sad, bewildered, and alone. It is not entirely strange, then, that he accepted the admiring and enthusiastic friendship of Patmore, who was only twenty-two. It was definitely hero-worship on the part of Patmore and must have compensated and filled some void in the older man.

Each poet had much to give to the friendship; and Patmore immediately assumed the role of disciple, admiring Tennyson not only as a poet but as a man. The common interest together was a similarity in profession, temperament, and disposition. Both men were devoting their lives to poetry,

¹¹ Gosse, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

and both were serving the apprenticeship that poetry demands of her followers. Patmore could appreciate the sensitive nature of Tennyson. He, too, had suffered severely at the hands of critics although his sensitiveness was not so morbid as that of Tennyson. Tennyson had long buried himself like the sensitive hero in "Maud," his favorite poem, with a smoke screen of tobacco for extra cover. "I am black-blooded like all the Tennysons," his son quotes him as saying. "I remember all the malignant things said against me and little of praise."¹² Both men found social conversation difficult. Patmore's biographer noted that Patmore in a group was an excellent listener rather than a leader in conversation.

It is certain that his attitude on ordinary social occasions was receptive rather than active. He did not seem to have any care for or to be skilled in the give-and-take of average converse. He would sit at the head of his table, silent for the most part, looking happy and unembarrassed--his face wearing a sort of tolerant half smile--and would give, from time to time a genial assent to any words which seemed to him to hit the mark. Occasionally he would rouse himself and interject a remark which was, as often as not, seemingly irrelevant, being intelligible in the context to those only who knew him well.¹³

¹² "Tennyson in 1833," Times Literary Supplement, 597-98, Sept. 14, 1933.

¹³ Champneys, op. cit., p. 364.

Tennyson explained the same type of shyness before a crowd to his son.

I am never the least shy before great men. Each of them has a personality for which he is responsible, but before a crowd, which consists of many personalities of whom I know nothing, I am definitely shy. I think of the good man, and the bad man, and the mad man that may be among them and can say nothing.¹⁴

The acquaintance soon ripened into intimacy. The two new friends met constantly. Patmore would humor the nocturnal moods of the older man when his restlessness drove him out into the night; and they would go for long walks through the city, sometimes prolonging them into the early morning. Champneys records that this habit of night walking was retained by Patmore throughout his life, in fact, continued until a very few days before his death.

"During these midnight walks," Patmore told Gosse, "Tennyson often sank into a sort of gloomy reverie, which would fall upon him, in the words of Keats, 'Sudden from heaven, like a weeping cloud,' and put a stop to all conversation." Gosse continued to say that while they walked the streets at night in endless perambulation, or while they sat together over a single meal in a suburban tavern, Tennyson's dark eyes would suddenly be set as those of a man

¹⁴ John Murray Moore, Three Aspects of Alfred Lord Tennyson (Manchester: Marsden and Co., Ltd., 1901) p. 57.

who sees a vision; and no further sound would pass his lips perhaps for an hour. These peculiarities were endured with patience by the younger of the two companions, partly because he was himself inclined to reverie, but particularly because his extreme admiration for Tennyson made him more indulgent.¹⁵

This disregard of personal likes and dislikes for his friend is shown in a small way by his complete toleration of Tennyson's chain smoking. He himself in his youth never indulged in tobacco, and he invariably found that even sitting in a room with others smoking gave him a headache. To be invited to smoke by Patmore, his biographer recorded, was the greatest sign of friendship.¹⁶

Together the young men visited a phrenologist. Possibly it was Patmore who suggested the visit because he had consulted one in Paris during his one year stay there. Patmore was fond of telling of that visit that Tennyson and he had made. The phrenologist, who had no way of knowing the young men, pronounced that they both possessed all the poetic faculties, but added that Patmore was equally qualified to succeed in business.¹⁷ This opinion, which Patmore

¹⁵ Gosse, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁶ Champneys, op. cit., p. 100.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 43.

by his fine administration of his country estate proved true, caused him to be a firm believer in phrenology.

The effects of Tennyson's friendship on Patmore's work were seen almost immediately. Forced to face reality, and unprotected by his parents, he was ashamed of his haste in publishing his poetry even while his friends were still praising it. Gosse attributed this attitude to Tennyson. He said, "There can be no doubt that the admirable judgment of Tennyson, so happily secured in exchange for the sultry complaisance of the old cockney circle, had much to do with this healthier condition of his spirit."¹⁸

Because of his failure in his own eyes, and also because of the demands made upon him for his museum work, Patmore did not attempt to write poetry for a period of time. He thought that he "wanted the grand essential leisure for writing poetry." In saying this, Gosse pointed out that Patmore is only repeating a formula of Tennyson's who justified his own aimless dreamy existence by saying that a life of leisure was the only one in which a poet could do justice to his imagination.¹⁹

¹⁸ Gosse, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

Patmore amplified his earlier statement by a fuller one in later years.

I believe that no amount of idleness is wrong in a poet. Idleness is the growing time of his harvest-- and the upcome of a year can be reaped in one fine day...

I have always found in writing anything, of consequence, that the idea, when it has got into my mind, has to brood there for years, without making any seeming progress, but in reality ripening, until the impossibility becomes all of a sudden the easiest of things.²⁰

The idleness that Tennyson enjoyed because of a pension was not open to Patmore. His financial problem was solved in November of 1846 when he received the appointment to the British Museum. Patmore liked his work at the museum and it afforded him the opportunity of meeting many interesting persons, some of whom became his literary admirers. One of these men, Alfred Fryer, in a letter to Sutton, gives the only verbal description known of Patmore as a young man. The letter is interesting, also, because it brings out the relationship between Tennyson and Patmore.

March 17, 1847

We went to the museum the day after I came, and had a long talk with Patmore. He is not at all like the cove we took him for. He is very tall and slender. He came here on Sunday and talked splendidly to us for four hours. We think more highly of him from his conversation than ever from his poems, although we by no means agree with the doctrines he expresses. He sometimes hears Tennyson read his own poems, which he does in first-rate style, his voice being in some of its tones like a

²⁰ Champneys, op. cit., pp. 250-51.

cathedral organ. Tennyson has two new volumes of poetry which Coventry says are far superior, in as far as he is acquainted with them, to anything Tennyson has already published. Mockton Milnes is writing a life of Keats. Coventry says that "if Keats lived ten years longer he would have been the greatest man we ever had"--perhaps he would, except Shakespeare; he says Keats's letters are equal to the writings of Emerson, and resemble them. "Young and Old England" took Coventry three whole weeks of hard work to write. We think him very unassuming and a capital fellow; he can laugh as heartily as you please! He looks very young, not as old as he is by three or four years, until he pulls his hat off; the forehead is broad and rather low, and his head small. He is not handsome, but has an interesting face. One would not think him a great man at first sight. We shall see him again in a day or two and then we can tell more about him. Rose and he had a small battle about religion, as you may fancy. He thinks of writing a poem to be "the" poem of the age, but half doubts his own powers. I tell him that the poem of the age "we" expect from his pen, and that, it seems to me, he has quite genius enough to write it.²¹

Two months later in May, Patmore met Emily Augusta Andrews, and because of his new financial security he proposed marriage after a short courtship of five months. The happy couple were married on September 11, 1847, at Hampstead. Emily immediately captivated her husband's friends. She was not forward but womanly in every way. Her beauty was immortalized by a trio of famous men; Millais painted her, Woolner carved a medallion of her, and Browning saluted her loveliness in poetry. Tennyson, usually a distracted observer of women, was completely captivated by Emily's

²¹ Champneys, op. cit., pp. 94-95

"splendid appearance combined with so milk-like an absence of pretension."²²

In speaking of these early days when the poor quarters that the Patmores called their home was the center of such great literary figures, Champneys said of Emily:

Patmore's friends, attracted not less by her grace and beauty than by his trenchant originality, love to enjoy their hospitality; and their house became a meeting place for much of the best intellect of the day. Tennyson, Ruskin, Carlyle, Browning with many others of only less note were frequent visitors, and Emily Patmore always gracious and hospitable proved an excellent and appreciative listener to the masculine talk; able, too, to take her own modest part in the more Olympian conversation by apt and witty remarks, while her deft fingers were always occupied with embroidery or work of more practical utility. The charm of this center of "plain living and high thinking" still survives in the memory of some few who were in the circle.²³

A series of short letters and excerpts from longer letters which Patmore wrote to Sutton, a literary admirer, and Allingham, a friend who was later to take the favored place vacated by Tennyson, show over a period of a few years the easy intercourse between Tennyson and Patmore.

The first letter, dated February 15, 1847, and written to Sutton, upheld Tennyson against Sutton's charge that while Tennyson wrote the "Lady of Shalott" he did not understand it.

²² Champneys, op. cit., p. 141.

²³ Ibid., p. 130.

My dear Sutton,

...I do not think that Tennyson is great enough to have written "The Lady of Shalott" without having understood it himself. We shall see when he sends me your analysis, which I returned to him some weeks ago...

Your friend,
Coventry Patmore²⁴

In another letter dated June 5, 1848, and also addressed to Sutton, Patmore told of dining with Emerson and Tennyson and mentioned a long poem which he had completed; but, upon Tennyson's advice, he was withholding it from publication.

My dear Sutton,

I have seen a good deal of Emerson. He dined here with Tennyson before he went to Paris and I expect to see much more of him now...

I regret that, admiring Emerson's writings so much, though very partially, I cannot sympathize with him personally. I am so bigoted that I seem to be sensible of a hungry vacuum whenever I do not find views of Christianity in some respect corresponding with my own...

Fryer will probably have told you I have written another long poem. Tennyson advises me to keep it by me for two years. I have also done much toward completing my collection of materials for what I cannot help thinking will be a very important work on Architecture. What are you doing? Reading, prophesying, marrying or what?

Yours faithfully,
Coventry K. Patmore²⁵

Five extracts taken from the long series of letters

²⁴ Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), Vol. II, p. 142.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 160.

to Allingham throw an interesting light on the friendship of Patmore and Tennyson. The first letter written from the Museum and dated August 19, 1849, was composed after Patmore's first meeting with Allingham. It is important in that it showed how deeply Patmore valued friendship, and the friendship of Tennyson in particular.

My dear Mr. Allingham,

Before you go away I must endeavor to tell you how much gratified I have been by our meeting.

Overwork, illness, and the disagreeable circumstances I told you of yesterday, united their powers to put me quite out of spirits during all the time I was with you; and I am fearful that this unfortunate depression prevented me from seeming to value your society as much as I ought and did do.

Believe me, I have made no acquaintance since I had the happiness of making that of Mr. Tennyson which has given me such satisfaction as yours has done...²⁶

The following short extracts are taken from longer letters to Allingham and dated November 12, 1849, April 17, 1850, and April 20, 1850, respectively, and they testify to the frequent interchange of letters and visits between Tennyson and Patmore.

...I had a letter from Tennyson a few days ago, and I am constantly expecting him here.²⁷

...Tennyson has been out of town some weeks, but I am expecting him back daily. His elegies are printed. I have one of the only half dozen copies at present in

²⁶ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 167.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 169.

existence. He talks of publishing them next Christmas.²⁸

...Tennyson returns to town on Monday--I believe. I would rather not show him your poems till you have done your best to it, for he is by far the hardest critic I ever knew. I will show him your little lyrics as you gave me permission...²⁹

The last letter to Allingham to be quoted is interesting in the comment made by Patmore on Tennyson. Patmore seemed to think that Tennyson needed children around him for better "mental health and comfort."

April 28, 1851

My dear Allingham,

Mrs. Tennyson has had a son born dead. I am very sorry for this, as I think that the sooner Tennyson has a few children about him the better it will be for his mental health and comfort. They like it at Twickenham--just the right distance to make visits pleasant by proving them sincere.

Mr. Ruskin has a new book out. The Architects are mad against it; but it is full of good stuff.

Very truly yours,
Coventry Patmore³⁰

The elegies that Patmore referred to in the second letter to Allingham were, of course, the first copies of "In Memoriam." The incident, often retold, of Patmore's recovering the manuscript in February of 1850 was the only

²⁸ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 173.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 174.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 167.

one in which most of Tennyson's early biographers link their names. The incident is best told in Patmore's own words:

Tennyson had lodgings up two pair of stairs, in Mornington Place, Hampstead Road; and I, who was lately married, lived hard by. We used to dine together two or three times a week. He liked his port, but did not care much about its quality. He got his bottle daily from the nearest Public. He often read me bits of 'In Memoriam,' then unpublished. After he had left his lodgings three or four weeks, I received a letter from where he was staying in the country asking me to go to his old lodging and recover the manuscript of 'In Memoriam'--a long thin volume like a butcher's account book. He left it in a closet in which he kept his tea and bread and butter. The landlady assured me that no such book had been left there, and objected to my going to see; but I insisted, and, pushing by her, ran upstairs and found the manuscript. Tennyson afterwards gave this volume to Sir John Simeon, to whom also I gave the letter asking me to look for it.

Tennyson's letter to Patmore is as follows:

Bonchurch, I. W.
February 28, 1850

My dear Coventry,

I went up to my room yesterday to get my book of Elegies; you know what I mean, a long, butcher-ledger-like book. I was going to read one or two to an artist here; I could not find it. I have some obscure remembrance of having lent it to you; if so, all is well; if not, will you go to my old chambers and institute a rigorous inquiry? I was coming up to-day to look after it, but as the weather is so furious I have yielded to the wishes of my friends to stop till tomorrow. I shall be, I expect, in town tomorrow at 25 M.P., when I shall be glad to see you. At 9:10 p.m. the train in which I come gets into London. I shall be in Mornington Place about 10 o'clock, I suppose. Perhaps you would in your walk Museum-ward call on Mrs. Lloyd and tell her to prepare for me. With best remembrances to Mrs. Patmore.

Believe me ever yours,
A. Tennyson ³¹

³¹ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 179.

The strongest witnesses to the real depth of the friendship came from the pen of Patmore in a series of letters to his wife in which he spoke intimately of the great value he placed upon his friendship with Tennyson. In a tender love letter to Emily which he had written from the British Museum on January 31, 1848, Patmore made a beautiful reference to Tennyson calling him:

The noblest of men whom we have the good fortune to love and to be loved by, says that there is merit between man and man tho' not between man and God:³² but there is no merit, I feel between a man and a woman who perfectly love each other and enjoy the heaven of marriage.³³

Patmore accepted an invitation of Tennyson and spent some time during the month of August in 1850 at the Tennyson home at Coniston Lake. In his letters to Emily he revealed his sincere admiration for Tennyson and his wife. In the first letter dated August 3, 1850, he paid a tribute to Tennyson's wife Emily, to whom he had recently been married.

Ambleside,
August 3rd, 1850

Dearest,

Mrs. Tennyson seems to be a very charming person, and I have already seen enough of her to feel that any description of her from a short acquaintance is sure to be unjust. Her manners are perfectly simple and ladylike, and she has the high cultivation which is only found

³² See prologue to "In Memoriam."

³³ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 136.

among the upper classes in the country, and there very seldom. She has instruction and intellect enough to make the stock-in-trade of half-a-dozen literary ladies; but she is neither brilliant nor literary at all. Tennyson has made no hasty or ill-judged choice. She seems to understand him thoroughly, and, without the least ostentation or officiousness of affection, waits and attends to him as she ought to do. She is of very pleasing appearance, and looks about 32. Tent Lodge is the prettiest place in the world. A moderate sized house, built and furnished in quiet taste, standing on the foot of a hill that shelves to Coniston Lake, along which a small park, which belongs to the house extends. There is a boat belonging to the house, and last night Tennyson rowed me halfway down the Lake.

Coventry 34

The following three letters addressed to Emily bear only the date of August. There is nothing in the letters to indicate possible chronological order. As they appear here, the first letter is again an indication of the closeness between the two families for the Patmores have asked the Tennysons to be godparents for their second child who was to be christened Tennyson Patmore.

Mr. and Mrs. Tennyson will stand for Baby. Tennyson seems to have talked so much to his wife about you that she already knows you and counts on you for a friend... Tennyson and I were taking a long walk on Friday, and had been talking for hours about other matters when suddenly he said, "What do you think of her?" "Who?" I said. "Her, my wife." "Yes," he said, "she is quite a perfect woman. She is a good deal like your wife."³⁵

³⁴ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 197.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 137.

The next letter from Coniston to Emily is filled with Patmore's enthusiastic regard for Tennyson, and in particular for the "inestimable value I always attach to conversation with him. Imagine how rich I think myself now." Patmore again makes a sincere reference to Tennyson's wife, who seems to have impressed him most favorably.

Coniston,
August, 1850

Dearest,

Nothing can be pleasanter than everything here. Tennyson is not writing just now, so that he gives all his time to amusing himself and us. Yesterday we were out almost all day upon the Lake. I find rowing capital exercise. I gave Tennyson Allingham's volume yesterday. A. would have had his head quite turned if he could have heard and seen Tennyson reading "Evening," "The Serenade," "The Pilot's Daughter" aloud among the water-lilies of the Lake. You know how much Allingham thinks of having his verses read in appropriate places and times. I was quite jealous of Tennyson's admiration of them. I never heard him praise any other living poet so freely, and he agrees with me in thinking that A. may achieve a very high position if he chooses. We dine at two o'clock, after which I get the most delightful "tete-a-tete" with Tennyson over his wine for two or three hours. You know that inestimable value I always attach to conversations with him. Imagine how rich I think myself now. After dinner, we go out, (mind I generalize from two days experience) again till half-past ten or eleven. Yesterday Tennyson said a great deal about you. He said he had never seen anything so enchanting as your innocence and simplicity of manner and mind. Do you not think yourself happy at having got among poets? I have just had a long talk with Mrs. Tennyson. She seems to be in all respects worthy of her husband. She is a thorough lady-according to my standard. She is highly cultivated, but her mind seems always deeper than her cultivation, and her heart always deeper than her mind,--or rather constituting the main element of her mind. She is familiar with the best modern books, Ruskin, Maurice, Hare, etc. Her religion is at once deep and wide; so that upon this and most

subjects I feel that I am most fortunate in having many opportunities forthcoming of talking with her.

The Post waits.
Yours,
Coventry 37

In the last letter is found one of Patmore's most outstanding tributes to Tennyson. He called him his intellectual superior "with a nature higher and wider than my own; at the foot of which I can sit happily and with love."

Ambleside,
Aug., 1850

Dearest,

I like Mrs. Tennyson more and more every day. She seems to like me, as she talks more freely than a woman of such character would without considerable faith in her hearers.

Yesterday it was too wet to go to church, and Tennyson read prayers, lessons, and a sermon by Maurice. The more I talk with him the more I discover that I was right in thinking that he has given a defective notion of his faith in 'In Memoriam.'

I cannot enough value my advantage in seeing so much of Tennyson. It is a great good to me to find that I have my superior, which I have never found in the company of anyone else. In the society of the nearly tip-top men, like Thackeray, Carlyle, and Allingham, I feel an inferiority only of the means of expressing myself--and this I sometimes experience even with the next class of talented men, like M_____ or L_____. But in Tennyson I perceive a nature higher and wider than my own; at the foot of which I can sit happily and with love.

...Speaking of Allingham, it is surprising what an impression he had made on Tennyson. He speaks of his immense capacities, and you know how chary generally he is of his superlatives. Tennyson has pointed out so many beauties I did not before perceive in A's poems that I

³⁷ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 197.

am coming round to his belief, that they are the best "first" book we have ever had.

It is satisfactory to find that my own judgment of these poems, made in opposition to everybody else's, is so confirmed. Curiously enough Tennyson saw the resemblance to Goethe immediately; and when I told him something about Allingham's manner and character, he dwelt upon the analogy over and over again, and seemed to contemplate for A. one of the most splendid careers ever gone through by an English poet. He quite sees his faults, his heartless artistism, and the great danger which may accrue from such extraordinary faculties united with so little wholesome feeling.

We are going to call on Dr. Wordsworth (at the poet's house) a circuit of some forty or sixty miles. You will be glad to hear the Tennysons are thinking of taking a house near London. They have asked me to look for one for them about Mill Hill or Barnet.

Coventry 38

In 1851 Patmore persuaded his colleagues at the British Museum to form a rifle club. As soon as he had begun the movement, Tennyson joined in and aided Patmore with both moral support and a poem, entitled "Riflemen Form," which he sent to the "Times" in May, 1851. Moore said that the poem rang like a trumpet call through the land and gave impetus to the movement. Balfe set the poem to music and it soon became a popular favorite.³⁹ Quiller-Couch stated the need of the movement as follows:

England had been irritated, if not seriously alarmed, by the vapourings of certain French colonels, "wide red breeches blown out by Fame"--in response to our criticism of their new sovereign. Ignoring the inalienable right

³⁸ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 195-96.

³⁹ Moore, op. cit., p. 76.

of this island race to advise its neighbors for their good, they so far forgot themselves as to advise us to mend our manners, in default of which, one general even promised to march on London with 10,000 men and teach us. Patmore, true citizen, followed up his practical essay in patriotism with a letter addressed to the "The Times." Tennyson took up the cry and wrote and published in the same paper his "Rifleman, Form!" The Government, at first, and as a matter of course, discouraged the rifle club experiments, but shortly afterwards issued a national appeal. The result was the Volunteer Movement, and of his share in it Patmore never ceased to be proud.⁴⁰

Patmore summed up his activities in the movement and pointed out that it was he who interested Tennyson in the club. The account in his own words is as follows:

In 1851, when England was a good deal excited by the threats of the French Colonels and by suspicions of the intentions of Louis Napoleon, who had declared that he 'represented a defeat' (Waterloo), and implied that he meant to avenge it, there was a good deal of talk about the propriety of organizing volunteer riflemen. Thinking that an ounce of action might be worth a ton of talk I went round to my colleagues at the Museum and all but one agreed to start a club, in which we should learn how to handle a rifle, and to endeavour to obtain members enough to justify us in asking permission of the Government to drill. I immediately wrote a letter to "The Times" saying what we had done; and several persons of eminence responded to it with offers of personal assistance. I asked Alfred Tennyson to help, and he took up the matter ardently, giving a handsome donation towards our expenses, and writing and publishing in "The Times" his enthusiastic "Riflemen, Form!" James Spedding and others also helped with money. We called a meeting and soon found able to make up a thousand men, willing to spend two pounds each on their equipment. We then wrote to the War Office for permission to drill. After some

⁴⁰ Arthur Quiller-Couch, "Coventry Patmore," Studies in Literature (New York: G.P. Putnam's Son, 1930), pp. 24-25.

correspondence the offer and permission were refused; but, shortly afterwards, the Government issued its appeal to the country for the formation of Volunteer corps--an appeal which probably would never have been made but for our offer and the expediency of arrogating the initiative of the movement to the Government itself. Rifle corps movements were at once formed all over the country,--two or three before ours got into working order. I used to go through the drill in Westminster Hall, but soon found it too exhausting for my strength.⁴¹

During the early years of their friendship, particularly between the years 1847 and 1857, the Patmore home was a mecca for the literary figures of the time. Poets and friends were drawn there by Patmore's personality and Emily's beauty, and also by the desire to meet through the Patmores the important literary figures of the day. Tennyson was now living at Twickenham; and it was "always Patmore who was introducing to him, now Emerson, now Ruskin, now Allingham, now the Rossettis."⁴²

Next to his friendship with Tennyson, Patmore's acquaintanceship with Allingham was highly regarded. It consisted chiefly of correspondence which always dealt with poetry. Much of the correspondence is interesting because of the light it throws on the relationship between Patmore and Tennyson. Often they would meet at the museum and go to Patmore's home for supper. Page recorded one such meeting

⁴¹ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 71-72.

⁴² Gosse, op. cit., p. 43.

and Allingham's account of it. It showed that Tennyson was reading and commenting on Patmore's work in manuscript form.

After some supper Patmore showed me in MS his poem "The Storm" or "The Two Journeys" ("Tamerton Church-Tower"). Tennyson's mark is on the margin in various places; "T". Patmore said, when Tennyson finds anything in poetry that touches him--not pathos--but a happy line or epithet--the tears come into his eyes.⁴³

In a letter to Allingham, Patmore again mentioned the Tennysons and also Thomas Woolner, who through Patmore's introduction became a very close friend to Tennyson.

8 Grove
J. 6, 1851

Dear Allingham,

Mr. and Mrs. Tennyson have not yet fixed upon a house, but I believe they are thinking of settling near Croyden.

Your friend the P.R.B.'s are to make a great show in the Exhibition next year. I believe Mr. Woolner is not at present talking of going to America. Mr. Tennyson has taken a great liking to him and has had him to stay with him and Mrs. T.: this, among other things, seems to have put our excellent friend into a good humour with England.

Believe me,
Very truly yours,
Coventry Kersey Patmore⁴⁴

The P.R.B., as it called itself, was founded in the autumn of 1848, and early in the following year Thomas Woolner, the sculptor of the Brotherhood, sought Patmore's acquaintance.

⁴³ Frederick Page, Patmore, A Study in Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 44.

⁴⁴ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 175.

An ardent and impetuous young man, Woolner was interested in verse-writing as well as in modelling. He had accepted with avidity the reforming ideas of his fellows, and like them he was deeply enthusiastic about the art of Tennyson. It would seem that Woolner introduced Patmore's "Poems of 1844" into the Pre-Raphaelite circle and in 1849 had the pleasure of introducing Patmore to Rosetti, Millais, and Hunt. One of the members of the brotherhood said:

Patmore must have been a year or two older than the oldest P.R.B., and we all looked up to him much for his performances in poetry, his general intellectual insight and maturity, and his knowledge of important persons whom we came to know through him--Tennyson in especial. From 1849 to 1853 we saw a good deal of Mr. Patmore.⁴⁵

Dante Gabriel Rosetti, writing in 1854, told of his actual introduction to Tennyson by Patmore.

In 1850 I ventured to send my first volume of verse to Tennyson. I don't think he wrote to me, but I heard incidentally that he thought well of it; and during a subsequent visit to London (in 1852, perhaps) Coventry Patmore, to my boundless joy, proposed to take me to call on the great poet, then not long married, and living at Twickenham. We were admitted, shown upstairs, and soon a tall and swarthy man came in, with loose dark hair and beard, very near-sighted; shook hands cordially yet with profound quietude of manner; immediately afterwards asked us to stay to dine. I stayed.⁴⁶

Most of the extant evidence of the friendship such as letters, and diaries and recorded conversations falls between

⁴⁵ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 83.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 84.

the years 1846 and 1855. The families were on friendly terms, however, until the sudden breach at the time of Emily's death in 1862. In the later years of the 1850's Tennyson and Patmore probably did not see so much of each other as in the first years of their friendship, but in a letter to Allingham in 1857 Emily Patmore tells of staying at Freshwater with the Tennysons. While there she listened to Tennyson read parts of his "King Arthur Poems" for which she had previously done some research.⁴⁷

Freeman, in making a comparison between the two poets, noted the differences which had begun to pave the way toward the ultimate breach in the friendship.

Great poets are creatures of their age, even if they show greatness equally in expressing and transcending it. Patmore and Tennyson were both Victorian poets and in the truest sense the voices of their time; and they each, but in a different degree, transcended their time. Tennyson was a dominating figure, standing firm amid his generation and only distinguished by his loftiness of thought and grave attitude of a spiritual legislator: but Patmore was isolated alike by his genius and by the intense arrogance of his regard of a world surging turbulently beneath him. He expressed his time in "The Angel in the House," he transcended it in the "Unknown Eros," standing scornfully or sorrowfully remote in many odes in the latter, consciously and even proudly alien in certain prose essays.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 83.

⁴⁸ John Freeman, "Coventry Patmore," The Quarterly Review, 240:123, July, 1923.

The actual open break between Tennyson and Patmore did not take place until 1862, but the real reasons behind the coldness and indifference exhibited by both men were much more far reaching and deep rooted than may be apparent at first. It is better, then, to say that the friendship was severed by general decline rather than precipitated act.

In order to study the situation closely, it is necessary to analyze the position of both men. Again and again in the early days of the friendship, Patmore recounted the brilliance of Tennyson's intelligence. His praise of Tennyson's talents was unrestrained. Some of this over-enthusiasm can be explained by the exuberance of youth and the attitude of discipleship which Patmore had willingly assumed toward Tennyson. However, as the men became older, the maturing Patmore made a greater demand on the friendship by his desire to rise from the position of a disciple to that of an equal. The natural assumption of an easy change in status on his part was not so readily accepted by Tennyson, who enjoyed having worshipful poetic satellites about him. Champneys enlarged upon this idea when he said:

Such relations between the younger and the older poet (those who knew Patmore in later days may well find it hard to believe that his attitude could ever have been obsequious or parasitic) could not have continued permanently. As he advanced in years, in mental maturity, and in fixity of ideas, Patmore must necessarily have assumed a position of greater equality and of increasing independence. Some such readjustment in the relations

of two persons of unequal age is a matter of constant necessity whether they be members of the same family or merely friends... What is in earlier life a substantial superiority counts for little at more advanced stages, and equality is practically reached when both have attained to maturity. The acceptance of such gradual changes of relative position makes a distinct call on elasticity and generosity of temperament. On the one hand the original superiority has to be surrendered with grace; on the other the new independence has to be asserted without arrogance. In the present case I can imagine that the adaptation may have been attended with some slight friction. One may suspect on the one hand, some survival of a predominance which was already a little out of date, while, on the other, Patmore may not have shown himself too tactful or conciliatory in asserting the independence due to his own more recently acquired maturity.⁴⁹

Patmore noticed a difference, too, in intellectual standards. As he became older his own moral and poetic principles became more divergent from those of Tennyson and Patmore regretted the time spent following him "about like a dog." During all his life it was Patmore's wont to expect a very keen and instant apprehension on the part of his friends to whom he unveiled his inner being. Tennyson fell far short of this desire. In looking at the friendship objectively, it is interesting to watch the gradual decadence. For the first few years Patmore rendered supreme homage to Tennyson; then about 1850 in his writings and conversations there appeared slight criticisms, differences, and even excuses for what Patmore judged a failure in Tennyson to come up to previous

⁴⁹ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 181-82.

expectations. Finally, in criticisms which appeared in the later part of the 1850's is found outspoken rejection of much of what the laureate thought and said. Patmore more than once expressed his disappointment for the religious convictions expressed in "In Memoriam." In early criticism he believed that Tennyson meant other than he had written.

Gradually the doubt and compromise of Tennyson's thought began to stand out in bas-relief and to a man who was reading such authors as Swendenborg, Thomas Aquinas, Theresa of Avila, and John of the Cross, Tennyson's works offered a poor substitute and suffered greatly by contrast. With maturity, Patmore was becoming mentally stronger, his grip on life and reality was climaxed by his entrance into the Catholic church; while, in contrast, as Tennyson grew older, he lost his grip on that sense of reality which was never very strong in him. Gradually he hypnotized himself into evading doubt and finally became able to look into the future with complacency.

Patmore objected particularly to mental complacency and especially so in one who professed to lead and to teach others.

Shane Leslie attributed the breach in friendship to the dissimilarity of outlook in the two men.

The breach in their friendship is mysterious. It was not through jealousy of similar aims. It lay rather in the difference between the poles they sought. Patmore had decided to write with and for the elect. He became and remained a poet's poet. Tennyson had begun his sonorous appeal to the middle classes and the Royal

Family. Patmore stepped out of the adulation, which surrounded Tennyson like a trailing halo. He even dared to be critical.⁵⁰

There were other contributing causes for the common separation. Patmore believed, and indeed had proof, that Tennyson as well as Swinburne had used freely lines from poems which he had circulated in manuscript form. In an autograph note to the Ode, "To the Body," Patmore said:

The proofs of the additional sixteen Odes were in print and in the hands of many of my friends, Lord Houghton, Mr. Monteith, A. de Vere, Woolner, etc. about twelve months before their publication in the second addition of "Eros." Just before their publication a volume of Mr. Swinburne appeared with these lines in it;--

"God's little pleasure house
For him and for his spouse."

About the same time in a volume by Lord Tennyson appeared the expression:

"with snow in lieu of lilies:"
my "who left the lilies in her body's lieu" (Child's Purchase) was in print and private circulation many months before.⁵¹

Although Tennyson never knew that Patmore was a consistent literary critic of his works, he resented the fact that Patmore would dare to criticise at all. Patmore was a keen and discerning critic. He detected shallowness and narrowness of outlook in poems like "In Memoriam" and "Maud" while others were praising them extravagantly. Later poems

⁵⁰ Shane Leslie, "Coventry Patmore," Studies in Sublime Failure (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1932), p. 136.

⁵¹ Patmore, Coventry, The Unknown Eros and Other Odes (London: George Bell and Sons, 1877), p. 223.

of the laureate he dismissed with the subcontemptuous epithet of "Tennysonian." Even as early as 1848 his criticism of Tennyson was outspoken and to the Preraphaelite Brotherhood he said that Burns was a greater poet than Tennyson, "in which opinion Tennyson himself fully concurs." Patmore added a compliment, however, typical of the many he paid to Tennyson at this time: "Tennyson is the greatest man I ever came in contact with, far greater in his life than in his writing."⁵²

Gradually criticism of the pen passed into bitterness of words. When Edmund Gosse complained that Tennyson had extorted a fee of 150 pounds for a single song called "The Throstle," Patmore remarked with fervour that he would not have written the poem for twice as much. Incidents and feelings such as these are not the ground upon which friendship can either exist or thrive. It was not strange, then, that the years made reconciliation impossible to either man.

The reason for the immediate break or coldness between the two families came in 1862. Emily's long illness had put a severe strain on Patmore's limited financial resources, and closer friends realized this. Some friend, unnamed by his biographer, began a memorial for a grant from the Literary Fund without consulting Patmore. Among the first people to

⁵² Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 90.

which they appealed were the Tennysons, who naturally believed the scheme to have Patmore's sanction. When Patmore learned of the collection, he stopped it immediately and without realizing that the Tennysons had acted in the best of faith blamed them for their part in the transaction. He regarded it as a personal insult when in reality it was the tribute of friends who enjoyed helping one whom they respected and loved. To Patmore, the whole incident was most humiliating and judging it as he did from a position of wounded ego, he was most unfair. However, some excuse may be offered for him when it is realized that his knowledge of the subscription came almost coincident with Emily's death on July 5, 1862. His letters to Mr. Blewitt and to the Tennysons are dated just four days later on July 9. The letters which stopped all forms of the collection are as follows:

Dear Mrs. Tennyson,

I could not feel that the course which your kind anxiety for me induced you to take was one of which I was justified by my circumstances in reaping the fruits. I therefore, wrote to Mr. Blewitt to say so, and to stop further proceedings before the business of the monthly meeting commenced. Whatever pressure may be upon me at present, is I trust, nothing more than I shall now be able to recover from, with the discharge of every obligation, in a moderate period of industry and economy.

With sincere thanks for your kindness and endeavours and expressions of sympathy, I am,

Dear Mrs. Tennyson,
Yours most truly,
Coventry Patmore.

Elm Cottage, North Road, Hampstead
July 9, 1862

Sir,

I have just heard that an application has been made for me to the Royal Literary Fund by Mr. and Mrs. Tennyson. Though done with the kindest intentions, this has been with an entire misapprehension of my circumstances and wishes, and I beg you to favour me by at once stopping any proceedings which may have been commenced in consequence of that application and by further communicating the substance of this letter to any persons who may have been acquainted with that application.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,
Coventry Patmore⁵³

At Emily's death it should have been Tennyson as a close friend to whom Patmore could have turned. Strangely there was a coldness, even unkindness on Tennyson's part. Perhaps he had been hurt by Patmore's attitude, yet, in time of such deep sorrow he surely should have overlooked it to some extent. It is probable, Gosse thought, that Patmore's affection for Tennyson had never been returned with anything like an equal ardor, but this had not prevented Tennyson's neglectful silence from wounding Patmore deeply. Gosse stated that in his bitterness he felt that love and friendship were alike lost to him and he developed a sort of austere inaccessibility which was new to him. Remembering his experience with Tennyson, he was unwilling to trust his confidence to others, and he drew aside into loneliness with

⁵³ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 185-86.

his children's cares and wants to distract him. ⁵⁴

In the intervening years his criticism of Tennyson became more severe and caustic. It was as if the old wound never healed but continually festered. As he became older his dislike became almost juvenile and often he criticised Tennyson's personal habits more than his work. Several times he drew his friends' attention to the fact that Tennyson preferred quantity rather than quality in his wine with such statements as: "He liked his port, but he did not care much about its quality. He got his bottle daily from the nearest Public." ⁵⁵ To Patmore who kept a well stocked wine cellar this showed lack of distinction. Harris, the editor of the Fortnightly Review, supplemented this reference to Tennyson's poor taste in wine by a similar one by Patmore.

Patmore was a most excellent host and after the meal gave us a bottle of Comet port, which Greenwood plainly relished.

"Tennyson's tippie," I remarked.

"You pay my wine a poor compliment," answered Patmore laughing. "Tennyson used to send for his port to the nearest pub; it was quantity and not quality he wanted; strength, not bouquet."

"Do you admire his work?" I asked. "Nearly all his later stuff bores me; after thirty he had nothing new in his pouch."

"Patmore," interrupted Greenwood, "was the man who found the true word for it. He called the early poetry

⁵⁴ Gosse, op. cit., p. 109.

⁵⁵ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 179.

Tennyson and the later poetry Tennysonian." One could not but laugh.⁵⁶

In speaking of Patmore's attitude toward Tennyson during these years Champneys said:

Certainly his spoken criticism of Tennyson was increasingly severe and thoughts of him bitter. Equally certain was it that much of the old admiration survived, though obscured by the later ill-feeling. I have often, after listening to some trenchant diatribe against Tennyson the Poet and Tennyson the man, and when the talk had for some time passed to other subjects, purposely alluded to some one of the earlier poems--when the old enthusiasm would break forth in words no less forcible than those in which the former strictures had been conveyed. Often too in our walks he would quote passages from the favourites of old days, evidently with undiminished admiration. It was obvious also that all that he had to say against his former friend was derived from the period of their constant intercourse,--that what he now quoted in disparagement of Tennyson had formerly proved incompatible neither with extreme intimacy nor with enthusiastic admiration. The unfavourable colour which such matters had assumed in retrospect must therefore have been altogether of later origin; and the inevitable conclusion was that Patmore's judgment had been warped by the estrangement; that the present bitterness was proportionate to the original affection--in fact represented the old feelings reversed.⁵⁷

Before either man died, however, one attempt was made at reconciliation. Patmore was induced by Thomas Woolner, who had become an intimate friend of both families to make an attempt at reconciliation. To Patmore's credit he did make such an attempt. The following letter to Tennyson which was

⁵⁶ Frank Harris, "Coventry Patmore," Contemporary Portraits, Third Series (New York: Published by the Author, 1920), p. 196.

⁵⁷ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 139-90.

written nineteen years after the estrangment, gave an idea of his sincerity in wishing to renew his old friendship:

Hastings, June 5th, '81

My dear Mr. Tennyson,

I have lately heard from Mr. Woolner that you are under the impression that I have, for a long time, ceased to desire the continuance of our former friendly intercourse, and he assured me that you have expressed a kindly wish that I should know, through him, that you were never aware of the last steps I took in order to maintain a position among your friends--a position of which, I need hardly say, I was always proud. I assure you that nothing was ever further from my thoughts than a voluntary neglect of your claims and my privilege.

When my wife, Emily, was lying dead in my house, I received a letter from Mrs. Tennyson, inclosing for my signature a memorial which had been made and presented by you to the Committee of the Literary Fund for my advantage. I confess that I felt a little vexed at that Committee--several of whom, by the way, were my personal friends--having been asked by you to render me an assistance which, as it happened, I did not need, and which, had I needed it ever so much, I should not have sought; but, as I knew that the step had been taken by you wholly in kindness to me, I was so far from expressing my vexation, that in a few days I followed up a letter to Mrs. Tennyson, thanking her and you, but saying that my circumstances could not justify the grant of a gratuity from the Fund, by another letter asking you, as you were in town at the time,--to come and spend an evening with me at my cottage at Hampstead, adding that as it was so short a time after my wife's death, I could not go to see you, as I should otherwise have done.

I thought in asking you to come and to see me at such a time, I was acting with marked respect and friendliness to you, and in the best way to remove any uncomfortable feeling which you may have had on account of the application to the Fund.

But I never heard again from you; and you will own, I think, that I should have been forcing myself on your attention had I done other than wait for the next word to come from you. It will be a great satisfaction to me to know that my letter never reached you and the Post alone has been to blame for our having each attributed

to the other some degree of neglect.

Begging to be remembered very kindly to Mrs. Tennyson,

Believe me,
Dear Mr. Tennyson,
Yours truly,
C. Patmore. 58

Tennyson's reply to this attempt was most unfortunate. Its very brevity portrayed coldness and indifference. A few personal words would have made possible the renewal of the friendship, but these words were not written, and to a proud and sensitive nature such as Patmore's, reconciliation was hopeless. Champneys said, "I quite remember his telling me that the result of the correspondence was such to afford no opening for a return to the former intimacy."⁵⁹ Tennyson's brief letter was as follows:

Farrington, Freshwater, Isle of Wight
June 11th, 1881

My dear Patmore,

As I am perfectly certain that I never received any such letter as you allude to, I can only regret that this long estrangement has taken place--and pray you to believe that I am

Always yours,
A. Tennyson 60

⁵⁸ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 184-85.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 187.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 185.

The intervening years had taken their toll and Patmore had travelled a far different path from Tennyson. His adoption of Catholicism, his second marriage, the extreme popularity of his "Angel in the House" which rivaled for a short while anything that Tennyson wrote, and his abrupt right-about-face in poetic principles as manifested by his mystical odes, had left little ground for common interests. Perhaps more than Tom Woolner, both men realized this and made only half-hearted efforts with little true intention of ever becoming again fast friends.

In fairness to both men, Champneys stated that any severe criticism of Tennyson by Patmore was "confined to private conversation, and that to the last, every word that Patmore published concerning Tennyson was courteous and appreciative."

Even at the time of Tennyson's death, unfortunate circumstances prevented Patmore's being present at the funeral of the Laureate. Patmore had travelled to London to be in readiness, but unhappily the invitation had been sent to his old home at Hastings. In a letter to Gosse, Patmore related what happened.

Lymington, Oct. 15th, 1892

My dear Gosse,

...I missed meeting you at Tennyson's funeral by the accident of the invitation reaching me too late.

I was staying in London and the ticket was sent to Hastings and thence to Lymington and thence to Town, where it found me just an hour too late.

Yours ever truly,
Coventry Patmore.⁶¹

As is evident from the letters and biographical data quoted, there is abundant material on which to establish the friendship of Patmore and Tennyson.

From a study of contemporary criticism the following chapter will attempt to show that critics of their own period recognized the literary relationship of the two men. The fact that critics were aware of this relationship did not insure success for Patmore. On the contrary, it often condemned him as a lesser poet and craftsman and forced him to assume a defensive role and to explain his own poetry. Even more important in establishing the fact that a literary relationship existed was the recognition of this by contemporary poets who were in a better position to judge than were the professional critics. The chapter stands as an attempt to show related literary efforts as the first chapter attempted to show friendship.

⁶¹ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 343.

CHAPTER II

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF PATMORE'S EARLY POEMS

If any attempt is made to show literary relationship between Patmore and Tennyson it must necessarily be based on the early works of Patmore: "The Poems" of 1844, "Tamerton Church Tower" and "The Angel in the House." In establishing this relationship a survey of the critical reception of Patmore's poetry is enlightening. Professional reviewers handled the poetry somewhat roughly. Patmore's personal friends and contemporaries were kinder. Both groups, however, were in agreement as to the similarity in form to Tennyson. The latter part of this chapter is an attempt to show Patmore's attitude and reaction toward this criticism.

Upon reading the 1844 volume most of Patmore's friends and critics were quick to recognize that Tennyson was a dominant influence in these early poems. The young poet had admitted that it was Tennyson's 1842 volume of poetry which had reawakened in him the poetic spirit and the desire to write. The small book of poems caused unusual recognition for a first volume by an unknown poet. Most of this was due, however, to his father's literary friends who had praised the poems enthusiastically. The book was reviewed voluminously and Patmore preserved a number of clippings from

contemporary papers which were favorable in general.

Most of the critics attempted to trace Patmore's poetic genealogy. The greater number of them agreed that he seemed to write "on the exact pattern of Tennyson," or "that he is a descendant of the Lake poets, especially Wordsworth, through Tennyson." Not only were the professional critics comparing the young poet's work to Tennyson, but his father's literary friends were also aware of the discipleship. The list of literary figures who wrote to Patmore made an illustrious roll call of Victorian writers. The Brownings, Leigh Hunt, Aubrey de Vere, Bulwer Lytton and Ruskin all noticed and commented on the relationship between the two poets.

The reviews and magazines of the period were already notorious for their treatment of men whose poetry was later to be called great. They had discarded and discouraged Tennyson and they spared no abuse in criticising Patmore's poems. The review most notably important, which appeared in Blackwoods Magazine, was decidedly unfair and completely unscrupulous. Much of the virulence was aimed at P.G. Patmore, who had unfortunately blundered as a second in a duel and had incurred the hatred of Lockhart, who was then in an editorial position on the "Maga" staff. There were many conjectures as to who was responsible for the article. Some

attributed it to John Wilson, the "crusty Christopher" of Tennyson's Blackwood's review, but Patmore did not believe that Wilson was the actual author. He felt that someone else had written it who was not personally culpable because he was "under an editorial command to lay it on."¹

Through twelve closely printed pages the reviewer lashed the young poet, piled fault upon fault, quoted the poetry out of context, and did not cite a single good quality or example. Of particular interest are the several references to Tennyson which appeared throughout the review.

'Lilian' is the next tale in the volume. This poem is an echo both in sentiment and in versification of Mr. Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall,' and a baser and more servile echo was never bleated forth from the throat of any of the imitative flock. There are many other indications in the volume which show that Mr. Tennyson is the model which Mr. Patmore has set up for himself; but 'Lilian' more particularly is a complete counterpart in coarsest fustian of the silken splendours of Mr. Tennyson's poems. It is 'Locksley Hall' stripped of all its beauty and debased by a thousand vulgarities, both of sentiment and style. The burden of both poems consists of bitter denunciation poured forth by disappointed and deserted love, with this difference, that the passion which Mr. Tennyson gives utterance to, Mr. Patmore reverberates in rant. A small poet indeed could not have worked after a more unsafe model. For while he might hope to mimic the agitated passions of 'Locksley Hall' in vain could he expect to be visited

¹ Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900) Vol. I, p. 52.

by the serene imagination, which, in that poem, steeps their violence in an atmosphere of beauty.²

The reviewer continued with a similar discussion of other poems:

There are several smaller poems interspersed throughout the volume. Mr. Tennyson has his 'Claribels' and 'Isabels' and 'Adelines' and 'Eleanores'--ladies with whom he frequently plays strange, though we admit, by no means ungraceful vagaries; and Mr. Patmore, as duty bound, and following the imitative bent of his genius, must also have his 'Geraldine' to dally with.³

The private criticism that Patmore received was more helpful to him than the favorable or caustic public reviews. The most valuable came in a long letter from Sir E. Bulwer-Lytton in which he gave wise, solid advice to Patmore. He, too, noted the similarity to Tennyson.

A more material point which I strongly urge you to reconsider is in that part of your art which related to details. It seems to me that in common with Tennyson, you cultivate details to the injury of the broad, clear whole. 'The River' is indeed a most exquisite poem, but it is by the details alone that you make it so. Had you paid equal attention to the elaboration of a great conception in which, after all, the details would have stood out clear, single and luminous at the close; you would have tripled the beauty and popularity of the piece.⁴

Robert Browning was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the young poet. Years later when Patmore

² "Poems by Coventry Patmore," Blackwoods Magazine, 56:335, September, 1844.

³ Ibid., p. 342.

⁴ Champneys, op. cit., p. 56.

regarded the early work as trash Browning still considered it good poetry. In 1884 he wrote to Patmore: "Many years have in no way altered my first impression of the genius which came on us all by surprise in your first volume." Elizabeth Barrett was much cooler, but Page believed that it was she who added eight words to an article which was being reprinted in Horne's New Spirit of the Age, and by doing so disturbed three pages of print. To the original sentence: "Tennyson's followers must have some fine poetical elements of their own in order to be at all successful," she added, "as in the recent instance of Mr. Patmore." 5

Ruskin, who became a lifelong critic and friend, also commented upon the likeness to Tennyson:

Dear Patmore,

I received the volume of poems with the letter--and am very much interested in them, their versification is quite beautiful--and much of their thought. If they were Tennyson's everybody would be talking of them, but they are a little too like Tennyson to attract attention as they should.

J. Ruskin 6

Not only in literary circles was Patmore recognized as a follower of Tennyson, but also by the reading public.

⁵ Frederick Page, Patmore, A Study in Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 27.

⁶ Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900) Vol. II, p. 277.

Champneys told about two young men who were devoted to poetry and who, having seen a review of the poems, decided to read them, and as a result wanted to meet the author. As Patmore's poetry was signed with initials, the young men, Mr. Fryer and Mr. Sutton, believed it to have been Tennyson's work written under a pseudonym. From their correspondence it was clear that such a rumor was circulating and they were determined to meet the actual poet. Mr. Fryer wrote to Mr. Sutton: "I have just seen Moxon (Coventry Patmore's publisher); Patmore and Tennyson are not the same. Patmore's father is a literary man in poor circumstances. Patmore, himself, is a barrister pupil of Barry Cornwall. Tennyson thinks that Patmore may surpass him." ⁷

In 1853, Patmore published "Tamerton Church Tower," a volume which contained the title poem and many revised ones from the earlier publication. While the poems were a substantial advance from the earlier efforts, they fell far short of the poem which was to succeed them. The character descriptions and love-making were lacking in the refinement which marked his later poetry. Quiller Couch said that it was hardly conceivable that the poet of nuptial love could have written "Tamerton Church Tower" because it was so vulgar while the "Angel" was so refined.

⁷ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 59.

"Tamerton Church Tower" did not meet with the reception that either the early poems had or the "Angel" was to receive, mainly because Patmore's father had at this time become one of the most hated men of English letters. The poem did attract some notice, and even modern reviewers commented on Tennysonian similarities. Garvin drew attention to these similarities of mood and versification:

'Tamerton Church Tower' while of no extraordinary promise, shows the budding instinct for a certain brief and vivid felicity of phrase.

Ere the summer's prime that year the wasp
Lay gorged within the peach;
The tide, as though the sea did gasp
Fell lax upon the beach.

Such lines, in the unmistakable manner of 'Mariana in the Moated Grange' suggest the persuasiveness of Tennysonian influence in a very young poet.⁸

Evans, another modern critic, has also pointed out the influence of Tennyson:

If the first volume suffered from contact with romanticism, the second, 'Tamerton Church Tower' had to endure confusion with the work of Pater Patmore whose 'Recollections' appeared in 1854. Even in places where the work of father and son was not confused, the memory of the father told against the rising reputation of the son. The volume consists of a re-publication of the earlier pieces of revised form, and of new poems. The new poems show that Patmore had released himself completely from the romantics. To Tennyson alone he owes kinship, particularly to the Tennyson of the English Idyls.⁹

⁸ Louis Garvin, "Coventry Patmore: the Praise of the Odes," The Fortnightly Review, 67:207, Feb., 1897.

⁹ B. Ifor Evans, "Coventry Patmore and Allied Poets," English Poetry in the Later 19th Century (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., n.d.), p. 134.

One of the most characteristic and most successful poems of the whole Victorian Age, "The Angel in the House," was published the following year in 1854. Over a quarter of a million copies were sold before the author's death, but the book today has become what Read called a "literary curiosity." The poem was the embodiment of Patmore's new theme, the glorification of married love, and it attracted the immediate appreciation of other poets such as Tennyson, Ruskin, Browning, Emerson, Hawthorne, De Vere, Landor, Hunt, and later, Meynell and Hopkins.

While all the criticism of the "Angel" was not friendly, it fared better than either of his earlier works. Patmore followed the early reviews closely. In a letter to Allingham he made a short summary of their contents.

British Museum
Nov. 6, 1854

My dear Allingham,

I do not want you to withhold in noticing in my volume anything a stranger (a judge of poetry) acquainted with my former doings, would infer from the volume itself. Thanks for the paragraph in 'The Critic,' which I had not seen. A copy was sent to the Dublin U., also to Kingsley, but anonymously. Rosetti was with him a day or two after he received it: Ruskin asked him if he had seen it or knew anything about a glorious book called 'The Angel in the House'. Alfred Tennyson is also emphatic in his prophecies of immortality for the same performance.

Hannay has written a notice of it in 'The Leader' regarding it from the ultra-pagan point of view, from which of course it looks rather dull. But the notice is respectful, which is the most I could have hoped, or even desired from the review.

'The Spectator' had also noticed it, in the beginning pronouncing it to be an imitation of Tennyson, in the middle, of Petrarch, and in the end declaring that it is a mere echo of Cowley; to complete this specimen of critical acumen the poem is bracketed with Gerald Massey.

Yours faithfully,
C. Patmore 10

Two months later Patmore's exuberance had faded when he wrote dejectedly to Mockton Milnes:

One column of very qualified praise in 'The Examiner' (as I hear, for I never see any criticisms) and a candid notice in the 'Press' (which nobody reads), is all I have got in return for years of preparation and labour, and an infinite sacrifice of world advantage to self and others. Unless the Quarterlies come to my rescue, my poetical career is at an end; for though while men like yourself, Carlyle, Tennyson, and Ruskin think highly of what I do, my confidence cannot be exhausted, my ability to print books at my own cost, and to devote to verse time that could be turned to immediate advantage, is. 11

These two letters aptly portrayed the contrariness of Patmore's dual attitude. He claimed not to have read the reviews, but he betrayed himself in letters and in conversations. As he had written Milnes, it was the criticism of the poets that most pleased him. In the original draft of the poem, Vaughan, the supposed writer of the poem, and his wife confess that they were expecting the work to be cruelly cut up by the reviewers; but they were hoping for the

10 Champneys, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 179.

11 Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 170.

consolation of a letter of warm praise from the Laureate.

Patmore was anxious for Tennyson's friendly review.

The expected response was not long withheld. Tennyson had read the poem in manuscript and, therefore, had known it extremely well before actual publication. De Vere, who was with Tennyson when he read the final draft, reported: "We read it sitting on a cliff close to the sea; and I had the satisfaction of writing word to Patmore that we had greatly enjoyed the reading." ¹² The Laureate conceded to the wish of the married lovers and wrote the following comment:

Farringford,
October 30, 1854

My dear Patmore,

Many thanks for your volumes. I still hold that you have written a poem which has a fair chance of immortality; tho' I have praised (Landon-like) so many poems that perhaps my praise may not be thought much of: but such as it is, accept it, for it is quite sincere. There are passages want smoothing here and there; such as:

'Her powder makes not defeats but pacts,'
a line that seems to me hammered up out of old nail-heads.

Others want correcting on another score as

'I slid

My curtain,'
which is not English. You mean I made my curtain slide and that (even so exprest) would not be good. There is nothing for it but

'I drew my curtain.'

Little objections of this calibre, I could make; but, as for the whole, I admire it exceedingly, and trust that

¹² Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 165.

it will do our age good, and not ours only. The women ought to subscribe for a statue for you.

Ever yours,
A. Tennyson 13

Ruskin never tired of praising the poem. In Sesame and Lilies he quoted a long passage and added; "You cannot read him too often, or too carefully; as far as I know, he is the only living poet who always strengthens and purifies; the others sometimes darken and nearly always depress and discourage the imagination they deeply sieze." 14 His opinion of the merit of the work did not decrease with the years.

When the book was published he wrote to Patmore:

Dear Patmore,

I am more and more pleased with 'The Angel.' You have neither the lusciousness nor the sublimity of Tennyson, but you have clearer and finer habitual expressions and more accurate thought. For finish and neatness I know nothing equal to bits of the 'Angel,'

'As grass grows taller round a stone.'

'As moon between her lighted clouds.'
and such other lines. Tennyson is often quite sinfully hazy.

Most truly yours,
J. Ruskin 15

Patmore appreciated and recorded Browning's comment when the "Angel" was first published. "I do not say that

13 Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 165.

14 Ibid., p. 168.

15 Champneys, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 279.

it will be now, or soon, but sometime or other, this will be the most popular poem that was ever written."¹⁶

The second part of the poem, "The Espousals" was published in 1856, and Patmore was still somewhat discouraged about the reviews. He wrote to Mockton Milnes in September, 1856 that he intended to write to the editor of the Edinburgh Review to ask him to give him a "puff." It is not known if he actually did so, but he was not reviewed by the quarterlies until January, 1858. The article that appeared in the Edinburgh Review was unsigned but had been written by Aubrey de Vere. Champneys stated that this notice and another by Dr. Garnett in Macmillan's Magazine caused more than one hundred thousand copies to be sold. Patmore published the third section, "Faithful For Ever," in 1860 and the final part, "Victories of Love" in 1863. With these two publications the poem was completed, not according to his original plan, but as much as Patmore intended to do.

Many of Patmore's contemporaries continued to criticize the poem through the second half of the century. De Vere and Garnett helped him with numerous revisions, and Browning continued a kind of fatherly interest, and expressed the fear that Patmore's change of faith and second marriage would harm

¹⁶ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 167.

its popularity. There is no record that Tennyson co-operated in its revision. After the estrangement, Patmore deleted direct or indirect mention of the Laureate from his works.

Unsympathetic with Patmore, modern critics have found the poem too Victorian. Most of them, as Nicolson, Page and Burdett, make reference to the influence of Tennyson on the poem. Few, however, express it as uniquely as Saintsbury who called Patmore, "a chicken clucking between Tennyson's feet."

Several of the contemporary reviewers had found the greatest similarity between the poets in versification. An analysis of their criticism and Patmore's defense of his metrical forms is interesting. The poems reveal Patmore's conscious imitation of Tennyson's early forms. In contrast, however, is the differences that Patmore and Tennyson held about meter.

Coleridge criticized the young Tennyson for beginning "to write verses without very well understanding what meter is." Patmore received much the same criticism. Both young men found that to understand meter a great deal of practice was valuable and their early poems introduced only established variations of form. Pyre charged that Tennyson was a derived poet who used the same meter again and again. Patmore in his early works was one also, for he based many of his poems on

the forms that Tennyson had already proved successful.

Patmore admitted that two poems of the 1844 volume, "Lilian" and "Sir Hubert" were written after a careful study of the form and style of Tennyson's poems.

Tennyson was more skilled at metrical variations than Patmore. Critics of Patmore have called him a poet of "one idea and one meter" principally because of his continued use of the metrical form of the "Angel" which is an iambic octosyllabic line rhyming throughout the first part in quatrains and throughout the second in couplets. Gosse attributed Patmore's easy metrical grace in the "Angel" to Tennyson.

When Patmore as a young man of twenty began to write verses, he seemed to possess a most defective ear. How far the extraordinary eccentricities which mar his volume of 1844 were wilful or accidental I am unable to say, but to read many of those early lyrics is like riding down a frozen lane in a springless cart. He had his peculiar theories of stress and accentuation, but I think, also that he had much in the art of poetry to learn. When he came to publish 'The Betrothed' in 1854 the lesson was already prepared, and I attribute the increase in smoothness and felicity to the close companionship with Tennyson which he had been enjoying. ¹⁷

Patmore became a close and accurate student of form. He was self-educated in poetic art and was recognized as a learned theorist. Symonds called his "Prefactory Study of English Metrical Law" one of the most valuable of such

¹⁷ Edmund Gosse, "The History of a Poem," North American Review, 164:286, March, 1897.

studies in English. Champneys stated that Patmore left abundant evidence of his endeavors to realize Tennyson's aphorism, 'Poeta nascitur et fit.' At times Patmore maintained that form was of even greater value than substance. In his "Essay on Metre" he said, "Indeed, the external in poetry is of more consequence than the internal."

As a student of meter Patmore qualified himself as a critic. He seemed always to be more capable as a theorist than as a singer and as a judge than as a poet. As a critic he considered Tennyson's metrical patterns almost perfect. In one review he called Tennyson's blank verse "the finest since Milton" and when he spoke of the varied patterns he said:

The second volume of Mr. Tennyson's Poems abounds with metrical excellence of every variety, the blank verse of 'The Princess' and the marvellously beautiful songs are worthy of all praise in this respect. But probably the most striking instance of thorough knowledge and pure feeling for meter which has been displayed by a modern poet is shown in the choice of the metre of 'In Memoriam.' This seems to us to be one of the most perfect rhymed measures for continuous verse ever invented. ¹⁸

Patmore and Tennyson did not agree with each other in every respect in the study of metrics. Patmore in a serious and rather pompous pose published his "Essay on Metre." In a letter to a friend he wrote: "The essay on Metre reads

¹⁸ Coventry Patmore, "In Memoriam," North British Review, 13:535, August, 1850.

dreadfully learned. Do you understand it? I am by no means sure if I do." 19

Tennyson undertook to challenge the young poet and chose the following selection from the "Essay" on which to comment:

The six syllable iambic is the most solemn of all our English measures. It is scarcely fit for anything but a dirge; the reason being, that the first pause in this measure is greater when compared with the length of the line, than in any other verse. Here is an example of what I select on account of the peculiar illustration of its nature as a 'dimeter brachycatalectic' which is supplied by the filling up of the measure in the seventh line.

How strange it is to wake
And watch, while others sleep,
Till sight and hearing ache
For objects that may keep
The awful inner sense
Unroused, lest it should mark
The life that haunts the emptiness
And horror of the dark.

We have only to fill up the measure in every line as well as in the seventh in order to change this verse from the slowest and most mournful to the most rapid and high spirited of all English metres, the common eight syllable quatrain.

Tennyson wrote the following letter to Patmore and parodied the idea expressed by Patmore in the above quotation.

My dear C.P.,
Specimen of the 'most solemn' English metre:

How glad I am to walk
With Susan on the shore!

19 Champneys, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 254.

How glad I am to talk!
 I kiss her o'er and o'er
 I clasp her slender waist,
 We kiss, we are so fond,
 When she and I are thus embraced
 There's not a joy beyond.

Is this C.P.'s most solemn?
 Specimen of the 'most high-spirited' metre:

How strange it is, O God, to wake
 To watch and wake while others sleep
 Till heart and sight and hearing ache
 For common objects that would keep
 Our awful inner ghostly sense
 Unrouses, lest it by chance should mark
 The life that haunts the emptiness
 And horrors of the formless dark.

Is this C.P.'s rapid and high-spirited?

A.T. 20

There is no record that Patmore replied to Tennyson; but he did not alter the essay in any way, although it was reprinted twice afterwards. Both Champneys and Page defended Patmore. Page said, "I think the answer would have been that Tennyson had converted Patmore's 'dimeters' into what Patmore called 'trimeters.'" 21

Evans is one of the few critics who has pointed out definite passages of similarity between the two poets. He cited the stanzaic form of "The River" as reminiscent of Tennyson's "Sir Galahad." There is a strong resemblance as

20 Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 177.

21 Page, op. cit., p. 165.

is shown by the following lines from Patmore's poem:

The guests are gay; the minstrels play;
 The hall is liker noon than night
 From side to side they toast the Bride
 Who blusheth ruby light;
 For youth and age, for clown and sage
 It is a cheerful sight. ²²

Memories of Tennyson's English Idyls intrude clearly into such stanzas as the following from the opening of "The Woodman's Daughter."

In Gerald's cottage on the hill,
 Old Gerald, and his child
 His daughter, Maud, dwelt happily--
 He worked, and she beguiled
 The long day at her spinning wheel
 In the garden now grown wild.

The poets were alike in their use of rime. Egan compared rime in Patmore's "Night and Sleep" to that used by Tennyson in "Tears, Idle Tears." In both poems it is only an accessory, internal rime, while the poetry sings itself. If an elaborate rime scheme were added, the poems would be ruined. Both poets believed that if rime were dismissed, rhythm and time must be used as the base for the structure of the verse. Egan showed that in his domestic verse Patmore used rime "in places where Tennyson would not have dreamed of, recklessly,

²² Evans, op. cit., p. 132.

audaciously; in his highest moods when his imagination is at its whitest heat, he treats rhyme as an echo." 23

Tennyson's poetry has always been judged for its beauty of diction and in this respect Patmore had much to learn. Few English poets were as enamored of words as Tennyson. He accumulated a studied poetic vocabulary and preferred rare or archaic words. Tennyson agreed with Grey that the language of poetry is never the language of the age. Gosse stated that Tennyson would never have been capable of writing "the bread and butter" verse of parts of the "Angel." Yet a number of the English Idyls, particularly "Enoch Arden," show little variety in diction and can be classed with the simple diction of the "Angel."

One of Tennyson's greatest accomplishments with his diction was his blending of language and mood. This practice showed in his early poetry and was perfected in later works. "The Lady of Shalott" is a classic example of this ability. Patmore very awkwardly imitated this marriage of language, landscape and mood. It is present in most of his poetry but especially in such poems as "The River," "Amelia," and parts of "The Angel in the House."

²³ Maurice F. Egan, Coventry Patmore's Odes (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1899), p. 9.

Leslie said of the two poets that they shared a "fifth sense in adjusting words." For them the perfect epithet was no use unless it was set in the perfect phrase. ²⁴ Being particularly careful of their word selections, both poets worked and reworked their poetry. Most of the revisions in Patmore's manuscripts consisted in word changes. He used to say that an imperfect line lay on his conscience like a sin.

Patmore did not like the use of "bastard Latinity" that seemed to be choking the poetry of the period. In his criticism of the "Idylls of the King," he wrote that the chief claim of the poems to fame would be their fine "example of vigorous unaffected and almost unmixed Saxon, written when all the ordinary walks of literature are becoming rapidly vulgarised with Latin." "No poetry," he continued, "has been written with so small an admixture of Latin as the 'Idylls of the King' and what will sound still stranger to the ears of those who have been in the habit of regarding the Latin element as essential to the majesty of poetry in our tongue, that no language has surpassed in epic dignity the English of these poems." ²⁵

²⁴ Shane Leslie, "Coventry Patmore," Studies in Sublime Failure (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1932), p. 135.

²⁵ Coventry Patmore, "Four Idylls of the King," Edinburgh Review, 110:248-9, July, 1859.

Patmore considered the language of Section CIII of "In Memoriam" "as the high-water mark of almost everything that is admirable in poetry." He pointed out that its most valuable quality was the perfection of the verse without the appearance of laborious polish. Patmore considered this the highest achievement of artistic execution which takes a poet years of practice to acquire. "Few poets," Patmore said, "have equalled the author of 'In Memoriam' in the complete conquest of metre and language in the service of thought and feeling." 26

Excellent examples of Patmore's ability to blend language and landscape are portrayed in the following selections from "The Gardener's Daughter" and "The Angel in the House" and are called by Page, "perfect Tennyson:"

through the flowery mazes sweet
Fronting the wind that flutters blithe
And loved her shape, and kiss'd her feet,
Shown to their insteps proud and lithe,
She approached, all mildness and young trust.

From the "Angel" the homey details of window and chair show Patmore as the poet that Tennyson was in his English Idyls:

'Twas half my home, six years ago.
The six years has not alter'd it:
Red brick and ashlar, long and low
With dormers and with oriels lit.

26 Patmore, North British Review, op. cit., p. 547.

Geranium, lychnis, rose array'd
 The windows, all wide open thrown:
 And someone in the Study play'd
 The Wedding March of Mendelssohn.
 And there it was I last took leave:
 'Twas Christmas: I remember'd now
 The cruel girls, who deign'd to grieve,
 Took down the evergreens; and how
 The laurel into blazes woke
 The fire, lighting the large, low room,
 A dim, rich lustre of old oak
 And crimson velvet's glowing gloom. 27

Tennyson liked to think of himself as having acquired a classic style. He did possess the ability to wed classic themes to homebred scenes and thoughts. His "Ulyssis," "Lucretius," and the "Lotos-Eaters" portrayed nineteenth century thought and action.

Brooke said that nothing in Tennyson was ever done for effect. This Patmore considered a necessary quality of a great artist. An artist can only be satisfied, according to Patmore, when he has succeeded in concealing his art from all eyes but his own. He must aim not at his own glory, but his efforts must be directed to persuade men to pay the homage which the poet believes they owe to beauty. As soon as a poet's art is conscious, it destroys its purpose. 28 In his youth Patmore believed Tennyson to be such an artist but as he became older he found reasons to quarrel with the Laureate's

27 Page, op. cit., p. 90.

28 Coventry Patmore, "Tennyson's Poems--'The Princess'" North British Review, 9:54, May, 1848.

work. He complained of the thinness and indefiniteness of the matter dealt with and of its subordination to what he called external polish. 29

Some have criticized Patmore for his closely packed couplets and quatrains. Page said that at times it seemed more as if the author had striven to get in all he could, than to leave out all he might. Patmore did this deliberately and, as he related, was following Tennyson's example. He wrote:

It is complained that our poets, from Wordsworth downwards, have been psychologists instead of historians: but to our thinking it would be a fairer complaint that they have been historians without being psychologists...It is verity we want from a poet, and he may give us, then, as much or as little action as he likes...Goethe's 'Hermann and Dorothea' a true domestic epic, has about as much incident in it as each of Mr. Tennyson's lovely Idyls: but what makes this poem one of the noblest inspirations of modern times is the fulness and verity of the psychological commentary by which its slight thread of incident is illustrated. 30

Patmore's poetry has been called "our great example of simplicity as a fine art." 31 Tennyson's work was also marked by a simplicity which showed itself in clearness of thought and expression. Garvin compared this quality in the two men as follows:

²⁹ G. Tyrrell, "Coventry Patmore," Month, 96:562, Dec., 1900.

³⁰ Page, op. cit., p. 86.

³¹ "Coventry Patmore," London Quarterly Review, 88:56, April, 1897.

Nothing could be more alien than the grandiose manner to Mr. Patmore, He had too much humour. His mode is equally great and singular with that certain intimacy in distinction which marks it. While we have in Tennyson the subconsciousness of an exquisite artifice, the simple; in Patmore we are aware of something, the furthest thing in the world, indeed, from artlessness, but which is simplicity and not simplese. 32

In a review of one of Tennyson's poems Patmore gathered together the attributes of Tennyson's genius which he believed made the Laureate's poetry great.

A classic finish of expression, the result of indefatigable labor and of days spent sometimes on a single line; an observation of natural objects so affectionately accurate and minute as often to be valueless to all but the microscopic eye of him who is in heart and mind, if not in act, a poet; a preference of that kind of beauty which he that runs can never read, which is 'the harvest of a quick eye' and requires much leisure of life and tranquillity of heart--two very rare things in this age--to comprehend it; a most fastidious taste in the melody of language, seeking purity of tone, sometimes even at the expense of strength on the one hand and sweetness on the other, and scarcely ever resting until it has arrived at the reduction of our rough and consonantal English to the bell-like clearness of the Italian; these, and most other qualities by which Mr. Tennyson's poetry is characterised, are certainly not such as could have been expected to produce a popularity exceeding probably that of any living English writer in verse. 33

Patmore was a poet of one theme, one idea. Shuster said that he had boldly made himself the poet of love and that

32 Garvin, op. cit., p. 214.

33 Coventry Patmore, "Maud, and Other Poems; In Memoriam," Edinburgh Review, 102:499, Oct., 1855.

in his understanding of the influence exerted by pure passion he was more powerful than Hugo. ³⁴ Both poets sang of the immortality of love. Tennyson's "In Memoriam" carried the theme through the entire poem and one line in Patmore's "Angel in the House" sums up the same theme in his poem.

'Love, sole mortal thing of worth immortal.'

Holmes, in speaking of Tennyson's themes, said that the poet was constantly writing of the triumph of love over death; a triumph inevitable while human love is a part of the divine and immortal love. ³⁵

Fleming contrasted the essential difference in the quality of the poets' love themes and demonstrated that Patmore's was necessarily deeper and richer because it had the sacramental and universal quality of Catholic love.

In Tennyson we find true notes of the Platonian ecstasy, when he 'came on That Which Is' and 'caught the deep pulsations of the world', but Patmore completed the cycle, and he did more. Versed in Aquinas, and John of the Cross, and extremely prone to find warrants in Catholic doctrine for the utmost ranges of his teaching, he early and in later life, too, caught up the thread of mystical

³⁴ George N. Shuster, "Poetry and Three Poets," The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature (New York: Macmillan Co., 1922), p. 109.

³⁵ Mable D. Holmes, The Poet as a Philosopher (Philadelphia: University Press, 1921), p. 91.

theology, and, urged as he believed by a momentous inner experience, expanded it to its last limits.³⁶

Because of the intimate nature of their poetry, the compelling power of their theme, and the fact that they were better lyricists than narrators, both Tennyson and Patmore are subjective. This criticism was hurled at Tennyson for "In Memoriam" and at Patmore for "The Angel in the House." Patmore, on the defensive for "In Memoriam," explained that subjective art was only bad when it was not self-conscious enough. He stated that complete subjectivity comes only with maturity of thought by a process of thorough self-knowledge, and few people ever arrive at this state. "In 'In Memoriam' the subjectivity is complete and, therefore, wholly admirable."³⁷

"Locksley Hall" was long a favorite of Patmore's. He modelled at least one poem on its verse form. Its theme of rejected love must have fascinated him as is shown by the following lines from "Faithful For Ever." These lines are very similar to parts of "Locksley Hall."

He wakes renewed from all the smart
His only love, and she is wed!
His fondness comes about his heart
As milk comes when the babe is dead

³⁶ W.K. Fleming, "Coventry Patmore," Life and Letters, 4:33, January, 1930.

³⁷ Patmore, North British Review, Aug., 1850, p.55.

The wretch whom she found fit for scorn
His own allegiant thoughts despise
And far into the shining morn
Lazy with misery he lies.

In common, Patmore and Tennyson shared a love for the classics and pagan myths and their use of them in poetry was similar. Patmore believed that there were no men without some truth in their teaching, and he, together with another contemporary, Francis Thompson, did not think it out of place to find in them analogies to Christian doctrine or the early Church. Their principal difference lay in their application of pagan art. Patmore christianized it; Tennyson made it Victorian.

In summary, the chapter shows that while Patmore pretended to be indifferent to criticism, he profited by it. In a comparison of some of the work of the two poets this has been made apparent. The criticism of the early poems showed the critics awareness of Patmore's model. Contrasting quotations of the work of the two poets show their similarity. Patmore's oral and written intercourse with Tennyson gives a sound basis for likenesses in style. Another invaluable aid in judging Patmore's appreciation of Tennyson is his careful reviews of Tennyson's poems.

In the next chapter the evidence will be presented to show that the literary friendship was not only apparent in the physical structure, but also in the thought content of their

poetry. This pays an even higher compliment to their close association for it is possible to imitate a stranger but not to share his ideas.

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF THE FRIENDSHIP ON PATMORE'S POETRY AND THOUGHT

A poet, writing during Victoria's reign, was faced with a dilemma; two courses were open to him and both seemed difficult. He could go back to the romanticism of the Middle Ages for poetic inspiration or he might follow the path of Tennyson who contemporized his poetry in the sense that its philosophy and characters were the thought and people of the nineteenth century.

Contemporary life poetry was not new in the history of literature; but in the hands of men like Tennyson and Patmore it portrayed Victorianism in all its doddiness, displayed its virtues, and tried successfully or unsuccessfully to explain the age to the people. Poets' audiences are naturally limited; but Victorian England, recognizing the intent and trend of their poetry, produced a wider audience than was common. Poetry appealing so universally and being understood by so many is limited in scope and depth. By writing this type of poetry Tennyson was assured of continued public approval, even though the poetry did not always merit it. The characteristic shallowness which complements domestic poetry seemed to be the determining factor which caused Patmore to

break from Tennyson's leadership.

To understand what these poets attempted to do in writing their "bread and butter poems," one must analyse the trends of their time. Most often the popular picture of the Victorian era was one which has become almost a tin-type. Pancoast stated that the Victorian age had been generally criticized unfairly, and the result was usually a caricature which magnified all that was weak or ridiculous and suppressed all that was enlightened.¹ Calling a poet a Victorian would often do more harm than good to his reputation. Scaife advocated divorcing the man from his time and then judging his poetry. This is unwise; because, as in the case of Tennyson and Patmore, it is an impossibility.

The new poetry had a certain tendency toward realism which was due partly to the influence of Goethe and partly to the growth of scientific habits of mind. The lessons that Tennyson and Patmore taught were the characteristic virtues of the period: self-control, self-sacrifice, faithfulness, loyalty to law, personal and social obligations. They were not aesthetic, but social virtues; and they showed the Victorian desire of stability. The average Victorian, afraid to face squarely scientific and philosophical upheavals, tried

¹ H. S. Pancoast, "Victorianism and Its Critics," Sewanee Review, 34:37, Jan., 1926.

desperately to stabilize his moral life. This artificial process became almost Puritanical in action, an impossibility for a whole people to follow. Burgum in speaking of the period noted:

The sins of the Victorian were of the mind not of the act; and therefore visited upon later generations. The penalty of hypocrisy is the disdain of one's children, and disdain for hypocrisy leads to disgust for the very admirable conduct that may have accompanied it. And the Victorian bourgeoisie seeking stability out of instability, unable to cope with a new and scientific viewpoint; yet thrust into a position of responsibility that forced it upon their attention became vertiginous. It lost all capacity to see life clearly, from being unable to see it whole. Its genius was for muddling through. Repetition became its substitute for logic.²

Patmore admired Tennyson's ability "to poetize the spirit of the present time." In a review of Tennyson's poems, he said, "No man reflects our age in his poetry more truly than Mr. Tennyson does." This "reflection of the age" in poetry, Patmore insisted, must mirror the things that are permanent contributions to the period whether for good or evil.³ Both poets sincerely tried to follow this precept.

Scaife suggested that one of the reasons for the failure of Tennyson's poetry and also for that of Patmore's domestic poetry, was, that while both men were showing qualities

² Edward B. Burgum, "Victorianism" The Sewanee Review, 36:290, July, 1928.

³ Coventry Patmore, "Maud and Other Poems: In Memoriam," Edinburgh Review, 102:513, Oct., 1855

of development in their new poetry, they were equipped only with a classical education. They erred, therefore, in trying to express the physical and intellectual rhythms which were being shaped by railways and the growth of scientific theories. This incompatibility caused imperfections in the two "Locksley Hall's", "The Princess," "Enoch Arden," and "Maud." "No other poet shows the failure of old bottles to hold new wine so convincingly as Tennyson," Scaife claimed, "for no other poet had attempted the task on such a big scale, nor with such imaginative and technical powers." ⁴

Critics have agreed that Tennyson possessed the clearest insight into Victorianism, for he did what the critics of 1842 demanded of him and brought the Victorian world of shops, ships and sea under poetic control. He early formed the conviction which he expressed in later life that a poet ought to speak to its generation about itself. He carried out this purpose by writing the English Idyls, "The Princess," and "Maud." Even in his classical poems he wrote of his age; his "Ulysses" was a Victorian rather than a Greek. Arthur's handling of the repentant Guinevere was more Victorian than it was Christian. Most of his poetry was weighed down by the formal code of the period and fluctuated between being embarrassingly silly or vapidly pontifical.

⁴ C.H.O. Scaife, The Poetry of Alfred Tennyson (London: Cobden Sanderson, 1930), p. 38-9.

"Good art is nothing but a representation of life," Patmore wrote, and his early poetry illustrated this theory. "The Woodman's Daughter" and "The Gardener's Daughter" were almost directly imitative of Tennyson. By the time he began to write the major poem of his early cycle, he was independent in the sense of theme but even more domestic than Tennyson in his approach to the subject. When he spoke of the function of the poet, Patmore defended his "representation of life theory" by the further statement that "the greatest of all functions of the poet is to aid in his reader the fulfillment of the cry which is that of nature as well as religion, 'Let not my heart forget the things mine eyes have seen.'" 5

Alice Meynell, who was a discerning critic of Patmore, said in defense of his contemporary life poetry:

The modern age chose to be ashamed of the manner in which it chose to live, to be associated, to prosper, to order its affairs; no other age has condescended to that kind of shame. But Coventry Patmore was not modern in this matter. He thought the daily ways of a cathedral town, granted they were delicate and gay, and not dull, no more unfit for "realistic art" than other contemporary ways, neither delicate nor gay, have been held to be before and notably since the writing of "The Angel in the House." Coventry Patmore wrote of conventions in the manner of a realist, and he had for this precedents older than his critics stopped to remember.⁶

⁵ Coventry Patmore, Principles in Art (London: George Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1889), p. 76.

⁶ Alice Meynell, "The Poetry of Coventry Patmore," The Athenaeum, 107:839, Dec. 12, 1896.

In "The Angel in the House," Patmore attempted to tell a tale of modern life in which the timeless truths of human passion would triumph over the prosaism of nineteenth century domesticity. Tennyson tried much the same idea in "Maud" but he chose an old romantic hall and allowed few modern details to enter the poem. Patmore worked with Pre-Raphaelite attention to detail and strictly observed the minutest circumstance of actuality. The result shows clearly the difference in the nature of their domestic poetry. De Vere said of the poem:

Mr. Patmore's hero does not hide his nineteenth century extraction in tartan or plaid or even in "homely russet brown;" he is a young man of good birth and gentle breeding; has won university honors and lectured at neighboring institutes. The lady of his love is one of three daughters of a certain dean of Salisbury. The scene lies chiefly in the cathedral close, or near to it, and the incidents of the poem are the familiar occurrences of English domestic life. The task Mr. Patmore has undertaken is to trace, with no more florid colouring and no more elaborate decoration than these, the ebb and flow of those feelings which are, in every rank of life, the well-head of poetry.⁷

The "Angel" earned for Patmore the title, "the high priest of domesticity," and it also brought him his greatest popularity. It became popular as a gift to a young girl who was engaged or to a young couple just married, and most Victorian reading rooms contained a leather bound copy of the poem. The reading public accepted the commonplaces in

⁷ Maurice F. Egan, Coventry Patmore's Odes (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1899), p. 27.

the poem but, for the most part, missed much of the essential element of Patmore's glorification of nuptial love. They saw nothing but the surface, and few, even the critics, ever looked at the underlying philosophy. Because Tennyson's realistic poems were only surface narratives they expected or looked for nothing more in Patmore. On the other hand, Patmore still attempted to read into Tennyson's poems more than the Laureate had put there. This was evidenced by his reviews of "The Princess," and "Maud." Burdett has shown how Patmore differed from his contemporaries, Browning and Tennyson, in the following quotation:

His aim was to interest his readers in a commonplace the greatest of the commonplaces of life. He eschewed the exception and praised the rule to be open to unsympathy accordingly. His subject was love under contemporary conditions of life delighting in obedience to law: an unromantic conjunction. His method was that of a realist who is ordinarily limited to prove. His period was the Victorian, in which we now discern a sentimentality and a complacency that we have transferred to other subjects. For each age is sentimental and complacent, but in regard to different things, so that these adjectives are always attached to the age of our grandfathers. Tennyson was sentimental about science, as Byron had been about melancholy and Shelley about liberty. Browning was sentimental about religion, as we are today about education and democracy. In his overt expressions rather than his underlying ideas Patmore was sentimental about love, and as we know the prose romances of the time were full of it. Patmore was not only subject to the same influence; but he balanced his sentimental tendency with a philosophy of love that was both profound and original.⁸

⁸ Osbert Burdett, "Coventry Patmore," London Mercury, 8:285, July, 1923.

Since Patmore chose and acknowledged Tennyson as his model for domestic poetry, it was natural to examine both poets for similarities in thought. Tennyson was believed by many critics to be one of the greatest chroniclers of the beauty of England's land and seascapes. While Patmore was not generally regarded as a nature poet, there were lines in his poems that rivalled Tennyson's nature descriptions.

The Laureate dealt with nature differently from Shelley or Wordsworth since he nowhere regarded nature as a living presence. He had the quick eyes of the draughtsman, rather than the rapt contemplation of the seer. Although he had little that was unusual to say about nature, he excelled in the scientific accuracy of his observation. Moore attributed this keen observation to a habit which Tennyson had formed of making notes of what he saw and heard in nature for future use. Moore quoted Tennyson as saying:

There was a period in my life when as an artist takes rough sketches in order to work them eventually into some great picture, so I was in the habit of chronicling in four or five words or more whatever might strike me as picturesque in nature. For example: 'A full sea with muffled moonlight.'⁹

Patmore parallels this habit. He, too, kept a pocket notebook in which he recorded exquisite or unusual nature

⁹ John Murray Moore, Three Aspects of Alfred Lord Tennyson (Manchester: Marsden and Co., Ltd., 1901), p. 23.

scenes. Page said, "His landscapes, his atmosphere, his skies, his seas are one with Tennyson's 'mellow lin-lan-lone of evening.'" ¹⁰ He observed nature minutely and scientifically. Garnett noted this exact perception:

I should not do justice to his endowments either as critic or poet if I omitted to mention his extraordinary keenness as an observer of nature. Nothing seemed to escape him; the descriptions in his poems are accurate to the minutest detail and he was no mere observer of natural phenomena; but meditated profoundly on their problems. I once heard him hold forth eloquently on the thesis that the apparent confusion of the starry heavens must be the most beautiful order if we could only see it; and not long afterwards read in the MS of "Faithful For Ever," 'The bright disorder of the stars is solved by music.'" ¹¹

Both men synonomously shared a deep love for the sea. Many critics recognized the outstanding qualities and breathtaking loveliness of their seascapes.

Tennyson pictured the winter sea:

as a wild wave in the wide North Sea
Green glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark...

Patmore described the "Wind and the Wave:"

And all the subtle zephyr hurries gay,
And all the heaving ocean heaves one way,
T'ward the void skyline and an unguessed weal;

¹⁰ Frederick Page, Patmore, A Study in Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 14.

¹¹ Richard Garnett, "Recollections of Coventry Patmore," The Saturday Review, 82:582, Dec. 5, 1896.

Until the vanward billows feel
The agitating shallows, and divine the goal,
And to foam roll,
And spread and stray
And traverse wildly, like delighted hands
The fair and fleckless sands;

Their love for seascapes is also apparent in the following lines which describe a wave breaking on the shore. Tennyson portrayed the white cap as follows:

The curled white of the coming wave
Glossed in the slippery sand before it breaks.

Patmore vitalized a similar scene:

Triumphing tide comes at the last to reach
And burst in wind-kissed splendours on the
deaf'ning beach,

In the conflict between science and faith that raged in the nineteenth century, Tennyson became for many the bridge that permitted a grasp on both without denying one or the other. He offered a compromise position to those Victorians who found their faith shaken by Darwin's theories. The idea of evolution was not new to the century because Tennyson wrote of it in "In Memoriam," which was published nine years before The Origin of Species. Patmore also dealt with science but not as thoroughly nor as widely as Tennyson. Tennyson displayed a knowledge of astronomy in "The Devil and the Lady" which was written when he was fourteen years old. Patmore's chemical interest was evidenced in his discovery of a new bromide at seventeen. This interest survived in

Tennyson's works but was only faintly present in Patmore's poetry.

In all probability Patmore and Tennyson discussed science for in an age such as theirs it was a common topic between friends and more so between poets. Patmore dismissed the study of astronomy with the words:

Put by the Telescope!
Better without it man may see
Stretch'd awful in the hush'd midnight
The ghost of his eternity.

Tennyson's attitude was not in agreement. In "The Princess" electricity and steam hydraulics go hand in hand with rustic sports. Brooke noted this tendency in Tennyson to introduce too many examples of physical science in his poetry and thus spoil it. At times Tennyson seemed to think that science was more important than poetry.¹² Contrariwise, Tennyson also wrote:

Let science prove we are and then
What matters science unto men?

Frankenberg analysed this statement and said:

There is a fallacy in Tennyson's misgiving but one "normal" to his period and still prevalent today. Tennyson feared that science might reduce life to mere matter, "cunning cast in clay," and deprive man of the 'spirit.' "The spirit does not mean the breath," he has nature say in an earlier section. In that case

¹² Stopford A. Brooke, Tennyson, His Art and Relation To Modern Life (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), p. 151.

what use would science be; what use would truth be if the truth were as base as that?¹³

Patmore's position was more easily reached and correctly reasoned. Even before his entrance into the Church, he was Catholic in thought. His was not the "truth in honest doubts" of Tennyson, and so he expressed his position on science as follows:

Natural sciences are definite because they deal with laws which are not realities, but conditions of realities. The greatest, and perhaps the only real use of natural science, is to supply similies and parables for poets and theologians.¹⁴

More strongly marked are the similarities between Patmore and Tennyson in their respect for law. They had a passionate regard for it and for its symbolism in England. In his poem, "Love Thou Thy Land," Tennyson's greatest praise for his country was that she was:

A land of settled government
A land of just and old renown
Where freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.

The two poets detested change in the form of government. They liked to think of themselves as country squires and reluctantly observed the slow wheels of democracy enfranchising the common man. Patmore termed the 1867 Reform Act as:

¹³ Lloyd Frankenberg, "Auden's Tennyson," Commonweal, 41:400, Feb. 2, 1945.

¹⁴ Patmore, Principles in Art, p. 74.

the Year of the great Crime
 When the false English nobles and their Jew
 By God demented, slew
 The trust they stood thrice pledged to keep from wrong.

Theirs was the attitude of the English aristocracy toward the French revolution which Tennyson had termed "the red fool-fury of the Seine." Both feared the power and "blind hysteria" of the mob whom Patmore called "Gergesenian swine." He despised the rabble and termed it, "The amorous and vehement drift of man's herd to hell."

In Tennyson and Patmore there is a marked difference in their standard or appreciation of what constituted law. Tennyson regarded the material law as supreme while Patmore bound himself with spiritual ties. Tennyson always refused to accept any form of established dogma. Yet, as Lilly stated, his characterisation of law was that found in Aquinas: "Law is a function of reason."

In a review of Tennyson's "In Memoriam" Patmore explained his conception of law.

All beauty from the highest to the lowest, from the 'beauty of holiness' to the shape of the trefoil clover leaf, is life expressed in law: all ugliness from the arch-hideousness of fanaticism to the malformation of a nose, is life deviating from law. Young ladies of a metaphysical, or young gentlemen of a scarbutic temperament, will tell you that this doctrine is cold and dead, and that life exceeding law is the only liveliness. These, however, who have read the New Testament to any purpose will have learned that life meets ever with its coextensive law, and that the life of the truest Christian,

of our Lord himself, is but the law's fulfillment.¹⁵

In answer to Lilly's commentary on Tennyson's conception of the law, Garvin made a comparison of the two men and brought forth the claim that Patmore had the greater regard for it.

Mr. W. S. Lilly the other day proclaimed the mission of poets, and instanced Tennyson as a missionary of law. But Tennyson was surely of the law-abiding rather than the law-asserting spirits of literature. He is an example, not a preceptor. The spirit of law implicit in him, is, in Mr. Patmore explicit, declared, emphasized, reiterated with a convincing reference to the most subtle sphere of law, that of love. Mr. Patmore was not only convinced of the high mission of poetry, but believed and said that the true mission of the true poet in this century is the exposition of the beauty and beneficence of imperative law...

He sings the penetrating joys, and elemental peace of voluntary legislation against the anarchy of sense. He proclaims the delight of bonds, the rapture of refusal and restraint, the dignity of ordered intention.

At this immediate point, we find the full significance of Mr. Patmore's mature philosophy. His assertion of the supreme excellence of law is conscious, deliberate, purposeful. His protest is so much the more momentous than Tennyson's as it is so much the more articulate and inspiring. Against the obvious excesses of the romantic movement and of democracy, which is the same movement rippling outward in widening rings, Mr. Patmore raises the most trenchant voice. 'Love without law is the definition of Dead Sea Fruit. Restraint is the alternative of futility.'¹⁶

¹⁵ Coventry Patmore "In Memoriam," North British Review, 13:533, Aug., 1850.

¹⁶ Louis Garvin, "Coventry Patmore: The Praise of the Odes," Fortnightly Review, 67:211, Feb., 1897.

Neither Patmore nor Tennyson cared anything for the social uplift of the working class. They preached the gospel of peace and love, yet, insisted upon an increase of militarism, worried about the smallness of the British navy, and saw the hope of Britain in increased world dominance. While they believed strongly in personal liberty, they loathed sentimentality and softness in others. Typically Anglo-Saxon, Tennyson and Patmore were inclined to be slow in forming an opinion on any important subject but were very tenacious of it once it was formed. Patmore was fond of saying that "there are not two sides to every question, nor, indeed, to any." Both detested the democratic movement, and it was Patmore, in his "Essay on Distinction," who put his thoughts most vehemently into words.

I confess, therefore to a joyful satisfaction in my conviction that a real Democracy such as ours, in which the voice of every untaught ninny or petty knave is as potential as that of the wisest and most cultivated, is so contrary to nature and order that it is necessarily self destructive.¹⁷

The two poets offered a strong contrast in their patriotic poems. Tennyson was highly optimistic for England's future, while Patmore was always pessimistic and continually praised the time of "England's prime." He had idealized the

¹⁷ Coventry Patmore, "Distinction," Fortnightly Review, 58:331, June, 1890.

past and was morbidly cognizant of the defects of the present. Yet, in contrasting six of their more important patriotic poems, it is evident that both poets were saying very much the same thing. In that strong poetic utterance "Crest and Gulf," Patmore preached the same message that Tennyson did in "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After." Both men said that the prophet is wisest and taught by heaven who confesses that he can see nothing; that this fresh stream of advance is only another fitful heaving in the sea of history. As Patmore said in his poem:

Crest altering still to gulf
And gulf to crest
In endless chase
That leaves the tossing water anchored in its place.

Tennyson and Patmore saw the ravages of the age in England, and their thoughts appeared in contrast in Tennyson's "Ode to the Duke of Wellington" and Patmore's "Lines on England." Patmore called indignation "a great maker of verses," but in most cases, particularly his political poems, where his indignation became violent, his poetry was less great. Tennyson never gave vent to his anger in poetry as Patmore did. Patmore hated both of Victoria's prime ministers. From his pessimistic attitude he saw Gladstone as another Danton. In his ode, "1880-1885" he wrote one terrible couplet:

Yon strives their leader lusting to be seen
His leprosy's so perfect that men call him clean.

Tennyson was a friend of Gladstone, yet, in a milder tone said much the same in his maudlin sonnet to the statesman on the "Redistribution Bill of 1886."

'Steersman be not precipitate in thine act.'

From first to last their political creeds were alike. Their ideas were parallel in every major issue. The years stripped both of them of many illusions but generally served to strengthen their grasp upon their early principles which were in Tennyson's words:

To hold the Spirit of the Age
Against the Spirit of the Time.

Briefly summarizing their political attitude, Patmore and Tennyson considered the aristocracy the backbone of England and failed to look beyond to the problems of the middle class. They cherished insularity, hated France and Ireland alike, stressed the need for preparedness for war, and vigorously supported the expansion of the Empire. This political credo which stretched across both their lives was termed by Tennyson "the middle road of sober thought."

When Patmore first planned "The Angel in the House," he told Emily that he had found "The first of themes sung last of all." With this poem he deliberately became the laureate of sacramental marriage because he wanted to give the age a new conception of woman; he wanted to adorn her with the honor and beauty that unworthy love in poetry had

taken from womanhood. Because Patmore sang on married love so continually through the period, he is often regarded as the lone poet with that message. Yet, when Tennyson and Patmore's poetry is read, they seem to share the same opinions in their respectful attitude toward women and marriage. In a study of this subject Evans wrote:

The main aspect of the romantic tradition accepted by the nineteenth century poets was that of Coleridge and Keats, the marvellous, the weird, and the magically adorned. Victorian poetry had achieved much upon that background, but the danger was one of narrow interest; a belief that poetry could do other things; from his close study of Tennyson he had developed a vocabulary and a method of his own to develop his theme of married love.¹⁸

There is a distinct difference between Patmore's conception of women in his early and his later poems. His women in early poems, such as "The Woodman's Daughter," and "The River," are but vaguely painted portraits. They are given no reality but are used by the poet to harmonize with the landscape as Tennyson does in his first poems, such as "Margaret," "Claribel," or "Mariana." Morse noted that "much in Patmore's diction and pictures would place his women with Tennyson's for play of emotion, exquisite purity of mood, elegance and grace of womanhood." ¹⁹

¹⁸ B. Ifor Evans, "Coventry Patmore and Allied Poets," English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., n.d.), p. 137.

¹⁹ James Herbert Morse, "Coventry Patmore," The Critic, 29:365, Dec. 5, 1896.

In 1847, while their friendship was at its height, Patmore told Gosse that Tennyson was completing a poem on the woman's rights question. This poem, of course, was "The Princess." In his attempt to solve this problem Tennyson showed that Ida erred not in seeking knowledge as men did, but in attempting to segregate women from men. It was Tennyson's theory that women who demanded equal rights were seeking "less for truth than power." Only by obeying the law, that the sexes must labor together, would woman attain that for which she was striving. In "The Princess" he said:

The woman's cause is man's; they rise or sink
Together

Patmore was less gentle in his treatment of these crusading women. With obvious indignation he published two short essays in 1851 on the woman's rights question.

It was among the feted and gaudy poppies which dyed the harvest of the French Revolution that the doctrine of the 'equality' of man and woman first, in modern times, arose. It has been blundering on ever since, with the vigor of ignorant and conceited zeal and is now echoed in many a shrill cry for the emancipation of women, by the female spirits of the age in Germany and America.²⁰

Tennyson and Patmore were commonly agreed that woman is subordinated to man. Patmore called her "the weaker vessel," "the last and lowest of all spiritual creatures made

²⁰ Coventry Patmore, "The Social Position of Women," North British Review, 14:577, Feb., 1851.

to be ruled and strictly ruled." In "Locksley Hall" Tennyson said:

Weakness to be wroth with weakness!
 woman's pleasure, woman's pain.
 Nature made them blinder motions
 bounded in a shallower brain
 Woman is the lesser man.

Again in another poem "Edwin Morris," which he published four years later after "The Princess," the curate Edward Bull said:

'God made the woman for the use of man.'

It is difficult to reconcile these views with later poems of Tennyson and Patmore. While both men hated the crusading woman, they literally worshipped the gracious wife or mother. Patmore said in his "Essay on Women" that the only thing that would safeguard the rights of woman in modern civilization was a diffusion of Christian ideals. This was the type of woman who was to be Patmore's "Angel in the House," and the type which Tennyson presented as a pattern of motherhood in the conclusion of "The Princess."

Not learned, save in gracious household ways
 Not perfect, nay, but full of tender wants
 No angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
 In angel instincts.

Patmore wrote of Honoria, the heroine of the "Angel:"

And round her happy footsteps blow
 The authentic airs of Paradise.

Patmore and Tennyson agreed on the sacredness of marriage, the beauty of married love blessed by the sacramental

bond of matrimony. Although Patmore was the poet of wedded love, Tennyson was the first to glorify marriage in the period.

The earliest poem in which Tennyson takes for his subject the marriage relationship is "The Miller's Daughter"...Other young poets have bestirred themselves to give burning expression to the ardor of the lover; to show the flaming eyes and heaving breast of Apollo as he pursued his Daphne; young Tennyson throws his strength into verses in which are described the proud constancy, the satisfied devotion of the husband.

Look thro' mine eyes with thine, True wife,
Round my true heart thine arms entwine
My other dearer life in life
Look through my very soul with thine.²¹

The following quotation compares Patmore's and Tennyson's treatment of women:

It is not surprising, therefore, that Patmore is so uncongenial. He is everything to woman except that which she now demands of man. He worships and sanctifies her; he calls her 'Lilith,' the subtle one; he treats her as a flower; but he never makes her his equal. Tennyson did the same, but he did it naturally and unthinkingly. Patmore, however, was deliberate, coldly evolving a sort of mysticism in which women, the ineffable symbol takes her exquisite but inferior place in a male and female universe.²²

There is little common ground for comparison of the two poets on the subject of religion. Yet, it would seem improbable that during the years of constant intercourse

²¹ Peter Bayne, "Tennyson," Lessons From My Masters (New York: Harper Bros. Publishers, 1879), p. 228.

²² Richard Church, "The Devout Amorist," The Spectator, 25:237, Aug. 25, 1928.

Tennyson and Patmore failed to discuss the problem of faith in their age. Tennyson was born into a family of strong religious principles, while Patmore was an agnostic as a child. As adults their positions were exactly reversed. Patmore, through self-questioning and seeking, had become a high Anglican held back from Rome only by the wish of his "Protestant Angel." Tennyson's belief had so degenerated that he could say:

There lives more faith in honest doubt
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

Tennyson was called by many a religious poet because he tried desperately to compromise, to tie the loose ends of science, religion, and philosophy together. He may have succeeded in the tying, but the knots were too apparent, his faith too small to bridge the gap. Anglican clergymen and the Queen used "In Memoriam" as a sort of Victorian Bible. It was a poor substitute when all that Tennyson offered was:

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

"In Memoriam" presented a huge stumbling block to Patmore. Through loyalty to Tennyson and yet, through greater loyalty to his own creed, he attempted time after time to read into it a greater faith than Tennyson intended. It is interesting to study Patmore's commentaries on religion in

the poem. From a position of defense he shifts to one of explanation and then to derision. In 1850 Patmore said of Tennyson: "He is far above all the pantheistic 'religious humbug' that taints so many half-geniuses in this day; and I am sure he would be horrified if he knew that any such men have been led by 'In Memoriam' to count him a fellow heathen"²³

In the same year in a review of "In Memoriam" Patmore explained:

Now the great philosophical worth of the poem before us, and the element of its merit, which makes it peculiarly what all great poems have been, a work addressing itself especially to its own time, is to be found in the fact that while it proclaims primary truths with an astonishing force of conviction and persuasion, it roots up, with equal zeal and efficacy, the poisonous weeds that are germinating in all directions and choking the good crop.²⁴

In another review five years later Patmore showed the first signs of doubt which later became absolute disregard for the religion of "In Memoriam."

Perhaps from the notion that this very emphasis implies an occasional obscurity of faith, and from a few careless expressions which we ourselves regret, Mr. Tennyson has had the unhappiness to be honored by some as one of the high priests of Pantheism; and others who have read him...believe one more plausible, but still false view, that they have in him at least an impugner of historic Christianity.²⁵

²³ Basil Champneys, The Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900) Vol. I, p. 195.

²⁴ Patmore, North British Review, August, 1850, p. 554.

²⁵ Patmore, Edinburgh Review, October, 1855, p. 504.

Tennyson cannot be classed among the religious poets of the period. His is the poetry of sentiment rather than religion. Sister Madeleva said that nothing that he had written can be called religious poetry. His poetry, such as "In Memoriam" speaks the language of platitudes rather than that of thorn crowned sorrow. 26

As has been shown Patmore and Tennyson's ideas were parallel on many subjects. They agreed on the propriety of contemporary life poetry. Both men recognized the God-created beauty of nature and admired particularly the beauty of the sea. Their political beliefs were strongly aristocratic and their poetic handling of women was beautifully tender and sincere.

Although the poets shared some common theories on the subjects of science and religion, their principal adverse ideas appeared when they dealt with these subjects. It was while he was analysing religion in Tennyson's poetry that Patmore first began to suspect Tennyson's unstable philosophy. This intellectual revolt more than any other factor caused Patmore to turn from Tennyson.

²⁶ Sister Mary Madeleva, "The Religious Poetry of the Nineteenth Century," The Catholic World, 20:213, Nov., 1924.

CHAPTER IV

PATMORE'S REACTION AGAINST TENNYSON

Patmore's personality was paradoxical. He has been called "a medieval mystic," "a married clergyman," and "a Turkish Pasha." His biographers revealed characteristics that would fit all three of these, as dissimilar as they might first appear. Judging Patmore after reading "The Angel in the House," the public expected to find a poet who was a mild and mellow sentimentalist. On the contrary, he was the exact opposite in character and appearance of the popular idea formed of him. Symons said of Patmore:

There never was a man less like the popular idea of him than the writer of "The Angel in the House." Certainly an autocrat in the home, impatient, intolerant, full of bracing intellectual scorn, not always just, but always just in intention, a disdainful recluse, judging all human and divine affairs from a standpoint of imperturbable omniscience, Coventry Patmore charmed one by his whimsical energy, his intense sincerity, and indeed, by the child-like egoism of an absolutely self-centered intelligence.¹

Patmore was an autocrat in everything: society, religion, poetry, and criticism. He never at any time mistrusted his own intellectual powers and always felt them quite capable of judging others. In tracing the change of Patmore's attitude toward Tennyson, one of the most important factors

¹ Arthur Symons, "Coventry Patmore," The Living Age, 249:539, June 2, 1906.

was his criticism of the Laureate's work. This criticism of Tennyson's work extended over a long period of time, although the greater bulk of it, published in periodicals, was written between 1848 and 1860. As the reviews appeared they revealed Patmore's decreasing ardor. This was a gradual departure from the first enthusiastic notices which he gave Tennyson. Although Champneys believed that Tennyson was not aware of the Patmorean authorship of the reviews, it seems improbable. Tennyson, much more than Patmore, carefully followed his notices and was not likely to let either laudatory or highly critical reviewers remain anonymous especially when they appeared in such important periodicals as the Edinburgh Review, and the North British Quarterly. Patmore was the regular critic of Tennyson's poems for these two magazines.

Patmore, whose pen could be over-sweet in poetry, was capable of the bitterest sarcasm in prose. In his prose work on poetry, Principles in Art, written when he was much older, he expressed the attitude that he felt in later life toward most of his literary contemporaries and toward Tennyson in particular who, he believed, never maintained a literary conscience. He thought that a poet should not "run before he is sent." Again he said:

A man who does his best, perhaps, to give us harmless amusement, and whose only crime is that of having succeeded

too well in adapting himself to the poor capacities and passing needs of his present audience is now in such danger, as he never was at any former time, of finding himself rewarded with ten thousand per annum here and an eternity of contempt hereafter.²

A study of Patmore presents many paradoxes. Although Patmore continually lectured Tennyson in his successive reviews of the Laureate's work and repeatedly urged the poet to follow his admonitions, he scorned any reviews of his own work, and became furiously angry when even constructive criticism was submitted. Patmore defined the position and work of the critic but would not admit of another's pursuing the same course. In Principles in Art he said:

It is not true, though it has so often been asserted, that criticism is of no use or of little use to art. This notion prevails so widely only because among us, at least, criticism has not been criticism. To criticize is to judge; to judge requires judicial qualifications; and this is quite a different thing from a natural sensitiveness to beauty, however much that sensitiveness may have become heightened by converse with refined and beautiful objects of nature and works of art...The pseudo-criticism of which we have had such floods during the past half-century, delights by sympathy with, and perhaps expansion of, our own sensations; true criticism appeals to the intellect and rebukes the reader as often as it does the artist for his ignorance and his mistakes.³

One of Patmore's earliest reviews of Tennyson's 1832 volume appeared in May, 1848, and praised it extravagantly.

² "Coventry Patmore," London Quarterly Review, 88:67, April, 1897.

³ "Coventry Patmore," Principles in Art (London: George Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1889), p. 1.

It is coincidental that the two poems that Patmore selected as outstanding were those which paralleled his own, "The Gardener's Daughter" and "The River."

All the peculiar faculties which have since been displayed by Mr. Tennyson were distinctly announced in his publications of 1830-1832. The constant predominance of thought over feeling is manifest throughout them.

The poet's intellect, to use his own words,

Flowing like a crystal river
Bright as light and clear as wind,
dazzles and amazes the reader in every page...

The most successful of this poet's first efforts are the pieces in which he delivers himself up to some peculiar phase of sentiment or passion, and contents himself with its simple expression; such are "The Miller's Daughter," "Mariana," and "Fatima."⁴

In the same review Patmore placed Tennyson among the greatest poets of the period. He particularly praised his originality and genius in portraying the spirit of the time.

Enough has been said by us to assure the reader that we intended no ordinary praise when we pronounced Mr. Tennyson to be an artist...

In original genius we conceive Mr. Tennyson has been surpassed, during the present century by Coleridge and by Wordsworth; but we have no hesitation in affirming that in the portion of the art of poetry which is to be acquired by reflection and by study, he had not been equalled by any English writer since the time of Milton. The most strikingly original feature of the writings of this poet is the success with which he seizes upon and poetizes the spirit of the present time.⁵

⁴ Coventry Patmore, "Tennyson's Poems--The Princess," North British Review, 9:43-44, May, 1848.

⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

In this review which dealt primarily with "The Princess" Patmore appraised the poem, but said that "Mr. Tennyson has not yet done his best." It was Tennyson's failure to fulfill this statement that had much to do with Patmore's loss of faith in him.

Even in 1850 Patmore realized the diversity in aims between Tennyson and himself. In reply to Allingham, who had sent him a poem to judge, Patmore said, "I believe that poets are the slowest judges of other peoples' poetry. I found numbers of commonplace understandings admiring Tennyson sincerely, when I could see little in him because he was not aiming at the same sort of perfection that I had in view for myself." ⁶

In August of the same year Patmore's first review of "In Memoriam" was published. In it he paid high tribute to Tennyson's poem and called the elegy an answer to his previous demand for "something more than exquisitely polished expression of ordinary thought and sentiment."

Now that our literature has been for many years entirely impregnated with Wordsworth's influence we naturally begin to look for the dawning of another light which shall correspond to our fresh necessity, as he did to the requirements of half a century ago. There is but one living poet by whom this want has seemed at all likely to be supplied. Our laborious analysis of "The Princess" sufficiently showed that we had faith in Mr. Tennyson for

⁶ Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), Vol. II, p. 108.

something more than the exquisitely polished expression of ordinary thought and sentiment upon which mere popularity rests and his reviewers, for the most part, dwell.

Our immediate impression upon the perusal of "In Memoriam" was that it claimed a place in the very highest rank and that it was the first poem of historical importance which has appeared since Wordsworth's "Excursion."⁷

As has been noted, Patmore's first review of "The Princess" was also one of enthusiastic praise. By 1855, however, he could spare little praise for either the poet or "The Princess." Champneys stated that Patmore attempted in the original review to read an occult meaning into the poem. He further attributed much of the diminution of interest and sympathy between the poets to Patmore's ultimate conviction that this poem, as well as others, could bear no such interpretation, and that Tennyson's work showed no progress on the lines along which his own thought was developing.⁸

In a review published in October, 1855, Patmore said of "Maud:"

The piece is fully all that it pretends to be--a medley; and if we have any complaint to bring against its 'author, it is not that he has failed in what he attempted, but that what he has attempted was not worth his doing. In reading this poem, the mind is palled and wearied with wasted splendour and beauty; passage or total result, proportionate to the obvious difficulties

⁷ Coventry Patmore, "In Memoriam," North British Review, 13:532, Aug., 1850.

⁸ Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), Vol. I, p. 108.

of such brilliant execution. Here, we feel, is expended in pyrotechny a power which might have heaved the earth. This feeling is not altogether pleasant; and Mr. Tennyson has proved himself to be possessed of artistic faculties which put it out of the question that he should himself be thoroughly satisfied with this performance. Indeed, we fancy that we detect in the work itself such signs of discontent as might naturally be felt by a great poet who had begun his work half in jest and without any intention of writing a long poem, and had suddenly found that his joke had attained unanticipated dimensions.⁹

Preceding this review of "Maud," Patmore wrote Allingham again. This letter revealed an interesting sidelight on his opinion of the poem and indicated the tone of the review which would be published a month later. Kingsley, in reviewing "Maud," had compared it unfavorably to "Tamerton Church Tower" and Patmore wrote angrily to Allingham.

What do you think of the gratuitous slight put upon you and me in Kingsley's notice of "Maud?" I would not change "Tamerton Church Tower," nor (if I were the author of it, "The Music Master") for fifty "Mauds."

Tennyson has made a hideous mistake in publishing it; and I should have told him my mind about it (as far as in civility I could) had he given me an opportunity. But he read me only a passage here and there and his reading magnifies the merit of everything, it is so grand. One or two of the love passages are to my mind exquisite.¹⁰

In the volume Patmore praised only the love songs and parts of the "Ode to the Duke of Wellington." He called the

⁹ Coventry Patmore, "Maud and Other Poems: In Memoriam," Edinburgh Review, 102:502, Oct., 1855.

¹⁰ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 181.

volume unequal and pointed out to its author that while Tennyson now enjoyed the patronage of the poetical public of Great Britain, with such work, he could not possibly continue to hold it.

The works of the present Laureate contain little to satisfy the cravings of the novel readers or the libertine and still further, are they from appealing to the taste and feelings of the vast class of readers who confine their poetical studies to moral and religious meditations....In morals and philosophy he is much too meditative and uncommonplace, and in religion much too vague and speculative, to be other than unattractive to the feelings of those who delight in proverbial philosophy of any kind or in the divinity of either Watts or Keble.¹¹

In concluding the review, Patmore once more asked Tennyson to attain to the standard of poetry which he and other critics accredited to his ability.

We once more call upon him to do the duty which England has long expected of him, and to give us a great poem on a great subject. On such a subject it is no secret that he had long had his consideration engaged. If he 'through thinking much of the end, cannot begin' and so allows the prime of his life to slip away without further actual result, he will not have acted up to the responsibilities imposed upon him by the possession of his extraordinary gifts.¹²

The subject to which Patmore referred was the Arthurian romances, but even here he was to be disappointed. This failure is apparent in an 1858 review of the "Idylls."

¹¹ Patmore, Edinburgh Review, Oct., 1855, p. 499.

¹² Ibid., p. 515.

The hero and heroine of the nineteenth century are waiting to have their portraits taken; but it seems the painter who is worthy of the work is not forthcoming. Our Goethes, Heines, and Tennysons, indeed appear to discern the truth, but they have not had confidence and courage to face it full and act upon it.¹³

Patmore continued to review Tennyson's work, but never with the same enthusiasm that marked the early notices. As the years passed, Patmore's religion and poetry became less and less like that which the Laureate had made standard diet for the people of England. Patmore became even more of a recluse, hating the mob and hating a poet whose whole appeal was to the masses. Patmore wrote for a select audience and even this chosen group did not always understand or appreciate him. His dislike for Tennysonian ideas and principles became almost an obsession but, as Champneys related, he confined it to private letters or conversation, never allowing it to appear in print. He acted as a Victorian gentleman even in this. One of the last opinions he ever rendered on Tennyson appeared in a letter in 1893 to St. Clair Baddeley who had sent Patmore a copy of his poem, "Tennyson's Grave." Here it is apparent that, while he did not hold Tennyson as a great poet, he had not completely disowned him. Something of the old loyalty remained if the respect did not.

¹³ Frederick Page, Patmore, A Study in Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 93).

Lymington,
July 25, 1893

My dear Baddeley,

Many thanks for your Poem which is full of beauty. To me its defect is that it glorifies its subject too highly. I know I may be wrong, but I cannot reckon Tennyson with the truly great poets. He is, of course, an immortal. No one ever wrote so well on his own line. But he did very little which seems to me to have been greatly conceived or passionately and deeply felt.

Yours ever truly,
Coventry Patmore¹⁴

The greatest disappointment in the friendship of Patmore with Tennyson was Patmore's realization that Tennyson's intellect was not the superior one he had first judged. There was in Patmore a quality that was puzzling to both friend and enemy. His severest critics called him an insufferable egotist; while his friends believed he possessed a superior intellect combined with Christian humility which enabled him to feel without pride that his mind was far above average. Patmore qualified himself as judge and jury when a discussion of any of the literary figures of the age was in progress. In a written memoir of a conversation with Patmore, Symons wrote:

At first I found it a little difficult to accustom myself to his permanent mental attitude with his own implied or stated preeminence, Tennyson and Barnes on the lower slopes, Browning vaguely in sight, the rest of his contemporaries nowhere, but after all there was

¹⁴ Champneys, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 267.

an undisguised simplicity in it, which was better because franker than the more customary pride that apes humanity or the still baser affectation of indifference.¹⁵

This attitude of intellectual preeminence developed gradually. At first Patmore had been flattered by Tennyson's attention. His admiration extended into imitation. A whirlwind friendship developed and grew strong in a short time. This seemed to have blinded Patmore to Tennyson's defects.

Patmore was enthusiastic in his praise of Tennyson's mental powers. He wrote to Emily that Tennyson was the only one at whose feet he was content to sit. Earlier he told the Pre-Raphaelites that Tennyson learned Italian in two weeks to be able to read Dante and he said that he would like to make the experiment and "would, if he thought he could succeed equally well." Patmore attempted to explain Tennyson's intense affection for Hallam by saying: "It is rather the affection of a man whose sympathies are so abnormally intellectual and whose intellect is so exceptionally high that he has not as yet found his equal among women." ¹⁶

However, as Patmore became more independent and more firmly grounded in his literary work, his incense offerings

¹⁵ Arthur Symons, "Coventry Patmore," Figures of Several Centuries (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1916), p. 363.

¹⁶ Patmore, Edinburgh Review, Oct., 1855, p. 503.

to Tennyson became fewer. An entry in the Pre-Raphaelite Diaries gave the answer to Patmore's rebellion against Tennyson. "Patmore does not believe we have any really great men living in the region of pure intellect; not even Tennyson, though he might have thought him such had he not written." 17 The last phrase was the most significant because it was in Tennyson's writings that Patmore discovered the greatest failure of intellect. Patmore frequently said that Tennyson's best work "though a miracle of grace, was never quite the highest kind." He explained this unconsciously by recording the fact that "Tennyson's incessant dwellings upon trifles concerning himself, generally small injuries, real or imaginary, was childish." 18

Patmore found many deficiencies in Tennyson which he attributed to the shallowness of his writings. If Tennyson had been compelled to "brest the blows of circumstance," Patmore felt he would have become a more powerful poet and dramatist. This was a peculiar accusation from a man who kept himself even more aloof from social and political affairs. He believed Tennyson to be intellectually timid, "a priest

17 Champneys, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 93.

18 Frank Harris, "Coventry Patmore," Contemporary Portraits, Third Series, (New York: Published by the Author, 1920), p. 207.

without a real faith," or a "prophet of comfortable things." After a diet of Swedenborg, Thomas Aquinas, and Therese, Tennyson's compromise religion of "In Memoriam" seemed like weak tea to Patmore. He once compared a poet to a saint: "He is above all the perceiver, nothing having any interest for him unless he can, as it were, see it and touch it with the spiritual senses with which he is preeminently endowed... He is the very reverse of a scientist." ¹⁹ Patmore thought that Tennyson lacked an endowment of spiritual values. He rebelled at what he called "an absolute defect of taste" in such expressions in "In Memoriam" as:

Dear as sacramental wine
To dying lips, is all he said.

or what "could be worse than such a periphrase as:"

the kneeling hamlet drains
The chalice of the grapes of God. ²⁰

Defining genius, "As that rare power of seeing self-evident things, or in other words, perceptive reasoning," Patmore saw that the Laureate failed in this. He reasoned that Tennyson did not think deeply, therefore, he could not feel deeply, and that his poetry lacked the authentic touches

¹⁹ Herbert Read, "Coventry Patmore," In Defence of Shelley and Other Essays (London: W. Heinemann Ltd., 1936), p. 96.

²⁰ Patmore, Edinburgh Review, Oct., 1855, p. 504.

of real emotion. Gradually he regarded Tennyson's poetry as superior in versification and diction but utterly deficient in a scholarly system of thought or emotion.

The final fault of which Patmore accused Tennyson was his attempt to "show off his breadth." Patmore continued to say that "many an immortal lyric or idyll has been lost because the lyric or idyllic poet has chosen to forsake his own line for the production of exceedingly mortal epics or tragedies." 21

Patmore felt that Tennyson lacked a fiery intellectuality and that none of his poems were remarkable for originality, independence of thought, or precision. He was most disappointed in Tennyson's apparent inability to formulate a definite credo of religious beliefs. Patmore had succeeded in learning to know and love God and he had little patience with Tennyson's failure to solve his "honest doubts."

As Patmore became more of a recluse, he assumed autocratic mannerisms. Many friendships paralleled the pattern of his with Tennyson. One critic compared him with his fellow Victorians as follows:

If he was like the other Victorian poets in his interest in Christianity, he was very unlike them in his entire lack of the spirit of rationalism, modesty and compromise. Tennyson, for instance, felt the difficulties in the way of blank logical assertions in all

21 Patmore, Principles in Art, p. 196.

great matters. Patmore felt such difficulties no more than the Catholic Church, or an International Bolshevik. In all questions he was as certain of knowing the exact truth as the Typical Victorian never was, but as some people are again today--very old Tories and very young poets. Another contrast with Tennyson may be seen in his attitude towards science. But he was never in the least daunted by it. They could not make him think the earth an insignificant item in the universe, or find matter as interesting as man.²²

While Patmore reserved the right to comment bitterly on politics, he remained aloof from domestic affairs and would not condescend to vote with all the "unwashed and untaught mob." In contrast Tennyson kept up constantly with current events and spoke audibly about internal affairs. At Tennyson's death Patmore's name was mentioned as a possible successor to the laureateship. Gladstone, a keen literary student, replied, "Oh, but are you not mistaken in supposing him to be still alive?"

Patmore declined the invitation to eulogize Newman and Pater after their deaths. Of Newman he said: "I have never taken much interest in contemporary Catholic history and politics. There are one hundred people who could do what you want better than I could, and I can never stir my lazy soul to take up the pen unless I fancy that I have something to say which makes it a matter of conscience that I should

²² "Coventry Patmore," Times Literary Supplement, July 19, 1923, p. 477.

say it." 23

Patmore presented a paradox to his age as well as to his critics. Contradictory by nature he seemed always to be at odds with the age and his contemporaries. He gave a definition of a poet that best suits himself. "A poet occupies a quite peculiar position somewhere between that of a saint and that of Balaam's Ass." Braybrooke said of Patmore:

Whatever may be said of Patmore he was an optimist who lived in an age of dreary pessimism. He wrote when decadence was eating at literature and driving men of letters into a black and hopeless materialism. He gave his allegiance to the Catholic Church because he could see that in her men could adhere to the real optimism; the optimism of the man who knows that his relationship to God is as intimate as that of a husband and wife. He was a thinker who was not in a hurry. He watched contemporary philosophies and found they contradicted one another. He was not amazed at life because he was certain in some way all was right with the world, and God was indeed in his heaven. His deductions were logical; they did not race to a conclusion and forget the necessity of orderly progression. Patmore was not surprised at the surprises of life, for God moved in a mysterious way and had indeed wonders to perform.²⁴

The greatest divergence of ideas between Tennyson and Patmore came in religion. Patmore had been Catholic in thought many years before he eventually took the step to Rome. During the first nine years after his conversion, he doubted if his earlier works were free from error, and, as a

²³ Symons, The Living Age, p. 54.

²⁴ Patrick Braybrooke, "Coventry Patmore: Poet and Philosopher," Some Victorians and Georgian Catholics (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd.,) p. 20.

result, he destroyed all the publisher's copies of "The Angel in the House." Later he realized that his sacrifice had been unnecessary. In 1886, he could state that "not one word need be altered in order to bring the 'Angel' into harmony with the Catholic Church."

As a result of spending more than four hours a day studying theology and reading the works of the mystics, particularly The Poems and Dark Night of the Soul of St. John of the Cross, Theresa's Road to Perfection, and Aquinas' Summa, he gradually became firmly grounded in mystical theology. This preoccupation with mysticism earned for Patmore the title mystic. Fleming wrote an interesting discussion in which he explained how this mysticism helped to further the break between the two poets.

There is no space to discuss mysticism here: its definitions are too many, and we should be led too far afield. But it has not inaptly been described as the science of love, and Professor Moberly has expanded this meaning not merely 'to love God, but, to be in love with God.' Patmore would have entirely agreed, adding that the love match is reciprocal, and is bridal in character. Nuptial bliss is 'the mystic craving of the great to be the love captive of the small, while the small has a corresponding thirst for the enthrallment of the great! Two results followed from Patmore's thought. He turned with loathing from Tennyson's preoccupation with Infinity--'word horrible at feud with life;' he cries out, with one of his startling expressions, and said that 'the pebble in the road but for the compulsion of strong grace would straight explode.' Coventry Patmore even in paradox often hit on what science using a different and vaguer word than 'grace' would set its seal to. The other corollary at which

the poet arrived, was the glorification of the body, 'little sequestered pleasure house, for God and for His Spouse.'²⁵

As his thought diverged from Tennyson, so did his poetic forms. His poetry became mystical, yet fundamentally his theme was still the same. The Odes, which were the result of his meditation, showed his power to turn "the formless blaze of mystic doctrine into human words of honied peace." The chief characteristics of his odes were continuity of meditation and richness of illustrative imagery. They also abounded in passion, passion in its intellectual and imaginative, not its sensuous form.

Patmore, in turning away from the type of poetry that was the "Angel" to that of "The Unknown Eros," described the process, as "living on brandy and soda water" as compared to the literary indulgence on "the roast beef of Shakespeare." This new type of poetry never brought him the popularity that the "Angel" had. Many thought that the poems were too obscure, but Patmore was never sure whether he effected obscurity or clarity. He wrote to Francis Thompson:

Two readings leave your poem very obscure in parts,
but not perhaps more obscure than Prophecy should be.
I am too concrete and intelligible. I fear greatly

²⁵ W.K. Fleming, "Coventry Patmore," Life and Letters, 4:37, January, 1930.

lest what I have written may not do more harm than good by exposing divine realities to profane apprehension.²⁶

As he had completely renovated his poetic thought, Patmore even more drastically changed his forms. He no longer used the regular verse patterns and standard feet which Tennyson had so completely mastered, but his variations from classical English verse forms and meters caused many to regard his poetry as a kind of free verse. Actually, Patmore accepted rhyme and used the caesura but he used them irregularly and made the pause depend on feeling and the rhyme on the emphasis of accept. Alice Meynell, one of Patmore's most enthusiastic critics, called the meter of the odes "their very poetry." "They move," she continued, "with indescribable dignity and with freedom of the spirit...No other metrical form could be so free and so living a communicative." ²⁷

Patmore's path had so completely left the highway which the Laureate had blazed through the century that during the last years of the period Tennyson represented the peak of England's poets and Patmore lived in virtual obscurity.

²⁶ Shane Leslie, "Coventry Patmore," Studies in Sublime Failure (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1932), p. 156.

²⁷ Alice Meynell, editor, The Poetry of Pathos and Delight from the Works of Coventry Patmore (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), p. ix.

Patmore's little fame rested on the almost forgotten "Angel," his most worthwhile achievement, while "The Unknown Eros" remained practically unknown. Freeman, however, believed that in the test of time through which all poets and their poetry must pass, Patmore would rank more evenly with his contemporaries:

In the case of his great contemporaries, Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne, much of their prolific work can be disregarded and enough will yet remain to compare with Patmore's entire production. They dealt with varied subjects, their sympathies were diffused over the colonies of the intellectual empire, but Patmore's virtue is shown in concentration. He is the peer of the greatest of them in his utterance of ~~ecstasy~~ and nobility of style. He alone is a metaphysical poet. But all these comparisons are foolish for genius is unique, and therefore incomparable, and the final impression of Coventry Patmore's poetry is an impression of pure genius. It fulfills Swinburne's strict test by eluding all tests and outsoaring criticism.²⁸

This chapter has attempted to show the different reasons for Patmore's break with Tennyson. Many factors contributed to the eventual divergence. The immediate reason for the cessation of friendship was the misunderstanding about the subscription fund, and Tennyson's negligence at Emily Patmore's death. The remote cause, Patmore's intellectual revolt from Tennyson, is by far the more important, and has been the subject of this chapter. It has been shown that Patmore went through a period of deep respect for

²⁸ John Freeman, "Coventry Patmore," North American Review, 218:232, Aug., 1923.

Tennyson's intellect, and this paralleled the time of close friendship. Through a study of his reviews of Tennyson's poetry the gradual breakdown of respect is apparent. Finally, after the complete disintegration of the friendship, Patmore displayed a thorough disregard for anything "Tennysonian."

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

"With Don Quixote, Coventry Patmore had come into the world three hundred years too late." ¹ Like the Spanish Don, he stalked through his age as a knight errant in search of adventure. Unlike Quixote, Patmore fought no windmills; his adventures were those of the mind and spirit. His was a life of invisible realities amid the commerce and pressure of the modern world. He championed beauty, but only the beauty that defined itself as "splendor veritatis" and he entered the combat, armed with the surety of faith, a faith dogmatized for him by the great mystics of his church. It was his intention to bring to Victorian England the truth that Aquinas had given to twelfth century Italy, and which John and Theresa had shared in sixteenth century Spain.

To study or understand Patmore's poetry demanded a long journey, spiritually and mentally, and few were willing to make it. Chesterton correctly evaluated the people's estimate of Patmore in his statement that the "Victorian English regarded him as an indecent sentimentalist as they

¹ Miss Bentham-Edwards, "Coventry Patmore, Poet and Mediaevalist," Friendly Faces of Three Nationalities (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1911), p. 73.

did all the hot and humble religious diarists of Italy and Spain." ² Patmore was constantly at odds with his time. While the later Victorians ignored him, he repudiated them. He constantly lamented that his age possessed neither distinction, romance, nor opportunity. Patmore seemed a man born out of due season, a small voice in the literary whirlpool of Victorian poets.

Chesterton called him a man "bursting with ideas, eccentric, florid and Elizabethan." ³ Johnson labeled his poetry "insolent," but in the "brave Elizabethan sense of the word; proud with the just pride of clear vision and Uranian compulsion to utterance." ⁴ Alice Meynell believed that the small voice of his poetry would continue to live and to be heard. In the preface to the edition of Patmore's poems which she edited, she stated:

Many poets are heard because a chorus of contemporaries sing with them and like them. Mr. Coventry Patmore's voice is single in his day, and single in our literature. It makes no part of a choir loud by numbers, and so it needs an attentive ear. To that attentive ear it sounds alone, as the divinest voice of our time.⁵

² G. K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature (London: Thornton Butterworth Limited, 1913), p. 202.

³ Ibid., p. 201.

⁴ Lionel Johnson, "Coventry Patmore's Genius," Post Liminium (London: Elkin Mathews, 1911), p. 230.

⁵ Alice Meynell, editor, The Poetry of Pathos and Delight (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), p. vi.

Even a short summary of Patmore's place in his period shows how completely he had divorced himself from companionship and literary groupings. In his early works critics saw only imitation; in his later poetry they could find no classification. While his fame seemed to rest on "The Angel in the House," an imitative poem, his future depends chiefly on his odes which were purely original. In some way Tennyson is responsible for both of these trends in Patmore. He is assuredly responsible for the imitative poetry and indirectly for the later originality.

In evaluating the friendship of Patmore and Tennyson, there has been only external evidence on which to base a judgment. As has been shown in Chapter One, there is sufficient proof to say without hesitation that a firm friendship existed. It was an allegiance profitable to both men. To Tennyson, it offered a type of hero-worship agreeable to his nature and a friendship which was a balm for his sorrow. While to Patmore it afforded the opportunity to learn many of the fundamentals of the art of poetry and the flattering prospect of having a comparatively well-known man as his friend.

Gosse stated that the friendship on Patmore's part was much deeper than that of Tennyson. It must be remembered, however, that there is a lack of written proof of Tennyson's

fervour or appreciation of Patmore because it had been suppressed by Hallam Tennyson.

It is safe to conclude the following facts with regard to their relationship. Between the two poets there was a strong feeling of friendship, a friendship that desired constant companionship, a sharing of time and ideas. It was based on the flattering attraction of an older and seemingly wiser man for a younger and clever one. For this reason it was not based on the firm ground of equal attraction but was liable to disintegration because of the type of personalities involved. For four years, from 1846 to 1850, the friendship was firm and constant, and from 1851 to 1862 it may be considered as a literary companionship.

It has been shown that Patmore's contemporaries and literary friends were the first to recognize Tennysonian influence in his poetry. Men like Carlyle, Ruskin, de Vere, and Browning were surely in a better position to claim and label this influence than modern critics. They could judge the poetry from an intimate knowledge denied even the most discerning present day critic. These literary men were not alone in calling the work imitative, as the blast from Blackwoods and other magazines so fiercely testified. Members of the reading public were quick also to recognize the similarity and to call the poems those of Tennyson.

Patmore lends a stronger evidence of his dependence on Tennyson by his own statement that he regained an interest in poetry and a desire to write it after reading Tennyson's 1842 volume. From his letters, conversations, and writings, it is possible to conclude his unbounded enthusiasm for the poet and his unlimited admiration of Tennyson's intelligence.

The study of the early poems has revealed numerous similarities in versification and diction. There is proved likenesses in the verse forms of Patmore's 1844 volume and the two earliest Tennyson volumes. In diction, Patmore successfully achieved Tennyson's ability to blend language and mood and to make the language "poetize the spirit of the present time."

In the treatment of their subject matter, the poets again claim a nearness of viewpoints. This has been shown in Chapter Three in a discussion of their contemporary life poetry. As nature poets, they share a common love of the sea; as patriots, they detest the workings of democracy which threaten to undermine their cherished aristocracy. Together they armed against France, railed at Gladstone for his liberal principles, fought "home rule," and strongly advocated increased British imperialism. Law, material and spiritual, was the dominating principle of their poetry.

In dealing with the subject of women, they are unorthodox, yet Victorian. Tennyson and Patmore are original in their determination to glorify married love and the mother in the home. But they conform strictly to the Victorian idea that woman is the "weaker vessel," "the lesser man." Neither could sympathize in any way with the "woman's rights" program outside the home, yet, both made woman an angel within.

The marked similarity of the early works served only to throw in bolder contrast the vehemence of the divergence of Patmore from Tennyson. Two main reasons have been given for the breach. The immediate cause was Tennyson's inexcusable coldness at Emily's death coupled with Patmore's clumsy handling and rejection of the literary fund. The remote cause, and by far the more important one, was the gradual levelling of the difference between the poets. With maturity Patmore's own self-assurance grew, and his estimate of Tennyson's poetic powers and supposed intellectual greatness diminished.

Patmore finally reached the point where he believed Tennyson did not maintain a literary conscience. This to Patmore was an unforgivable sin. Since he could write only under direct inspiration he wrote little, even sparsely in prose, and could not understand or at least refused to admit of a poet producing poetry with the regularity of Tennyson.

Patmore made poetry a species of divine revelation and in thirty years, the years of the odes, his poetry covers less than a hundred pages. To the final edition of 1886, he wrote proudly:

I have written little, but it is all my best; I have never spoken when I had nothing to say, nor spared time or labour to make my words true. I have respected posterity, and, should there be a posterity which cares for letters, I dare to hope that it will respect me.⁶

The odes and "The Unknown Eros" stand today as Patmore's proudest and best poetry. They represent the most prominent example of his complete revolt from conventional standards incarnate in Tennyson's work. Patmore might be classed "the sublime failure" that Leslie called him. Gosse, one of his principal biographers, believed him so. He said:

The causes of his failure to give expression to his own genius were many. But the most important of them, I think, was the excessive emotion which Patmore threw into his imaginative experiences. Other poets of his age, notably Tennyson and Browning, made poetry their business. They forced the ecstasy they felt into the channels of their art and mastered it, instead of allowing it to master them.⁷

But Patmore's or Tennyson's ultimate failure is not dependent upon the judgment of one or even a score of critics. What is worthless in their poetry will be lost; what is

⁶ Edmund Gosse, Coventry Patmore (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 180.

⁷ Ibid., p. 181.

classic will remain after the long sifting process of time determines it. Many have attempted to evaluate Tennyson's contributions to his age; few have tried to find Patmore's lesser place. Shuster places him as a link between the Catholic literary group and the Victorian poets.

It remains to add that the contours of Catholic poetry in the modern time are largely of his tracing; and though Francis Thompson is better known and Father Gerard Hopkins, from one point of view, greater, Patmore remains the only modern "poet of the Faith" who cannot be thought out of English literature. The reason is exceedingly simple. Everything he wrote, thought, and was, had to do with his central concern which was purity. Just as Browning kept marvelling at the taut-drawn bow of human destiny, or as Wordsworth looked for ever at the vision of beauty, so was Patmore drawn toward "the luster of whiteness," *ex parte infidelium*.⁸

It is apparent that the literary relationship of Coventry Patmore and Alfred Lord Tennyson was not an important one in the annals of Victorian literature. There are several reasons for this. Patmore's work was not exceptional enough or his place in literature brilliant enough to prove a suitable contrast to Tennyson. The literary friendships on which critics like to comment or speculate must be between equals to make interesting parallels. Because Patmore's mysticism was unintelligible to most critics, they preferred to ignore him or label him simply "lesser Victorian," or

⁸ G. N. Shuster, "Patmore: A Revaluation," Commonweal, 23:605, Oct. 23, 1936.

"Catholic literary group." Once he was securely placed in either of these dusty pigeon holes, he was safe from discovery by anyone but a probing Catholic critic.

Nothing can be added to the fame of either man by a study such as this. However, some knowledge of them and their age can be further gleaned. Looking at Tennyson through Patmore's Catholic heart and mind has given a clearer and broader view of the shallowness of the "typical Victorian mind." Even after diligent study, Patmore's poetry does not emerge from the mediocrity that stamps much of it. Yet, portions of the odes, which are filled with the fruits of his contemplations, rival in beauty of form and surpass in content any of Tennyson's best. To Patmore and Tennyson, then, friends for a decade and contemporaries for five decades, there is appreciation for a better understanding and knowledge, through their poetry and lives, of Victoria's England.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister Mary Paula Connor, O.P. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

March 16, 1949
Date

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